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THE EIGHTH WONDER
AND OTHER STORIES

BY A. S. M. HUTCHINSON

—O—

THE HAPPY WARRIOR

ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER—

THE CLEAN HEART

IF WINTER COMES

THIS FREEDOM

THE EIGHTH WONDER

AND OTHER STORIES

THE EIGHTH WONDER

And Other Stories

BY
A. S. M. HUTCHINSON



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NOTE

All these stories have been revised since they appeared in periodicals. "There Still are Fairies" has been slightly altered from the form in which, entitled "The Strike-breaker," it appeared in *Harper's Magazine*. "In Evening Bells" has been rewritten since it appeared in *McCall's Magazine*.

THE EIGHTH WONDER

THE EIGHTH WONDER AND OTHER STORIES

THE EIGHTH WONDER

You probably could not say straight off what were the Seven Wonders of the World. Personally I am always sure of the Pyramids of Egypt and sometimes have been able to add the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. I often with a flush of pride recall supplying, on one of my bright days, the Colossus of Rhodes; and I remember how profoundly stirred were the circles in which I move when, at a learned talk, a young woman of our company added the Temple of Diana at Ephesus. But further than that — !

Still, what's the odds? No one is any the better for knowing what were the Seven Wonders; nor for that matter is any one, knowing them, necessarily more widely read. Take the case of Edward Bryant. Edward, when he mounted the upper deck of the tramcar that was to take him to a meeting of the Excelsior Literary Society at which was to be read a paper on the Seven Wonders of the World, hadn't an idea of them, not even the Pyramids. He opened the packet of cigarettes he had just bought and took out

with a cigarette the picture card given with the packet; and there, lo! was on the one side a drawing of the Pyramids and on the other the caption "The Seven Wonders of the World" and their names.

"Coh! That's a coincidence for you!" exclaimed Edward to himself; and on a sudden thought pondered the Seven till he had got them by heart.

Arrived at the lecture hall and seated among his fellow members of the Excelsior, Edward proceeded at once to apply the sudden thought which had caused him to commit to memory the Seven. The vacant seat he found (an end seat) placed him next to a worthy couple, by name Mr. and Mrs. Hunt. Mr. Hunt, who had a short white beard and that air (which I always envy) of owning a place in the world and insisting on its recognition, was a retired merchant of small but sufficient income; Mrs. Hunt, who wore spectacles and a black satin dress, was of comfortable and motherly appearance. Edward knew the Hunts only by sight but it was the etiquette of the Excelsior Literary Society for neighbours at its gatherings to exchange a bow, a smile and a word or two, and these courtesies Edward with the Hunts therefore exchanged; then applied the results of that sudden thought of his:

"Ought to be interesting," said Edward, indicating his admission card on which was printed the subject of the evening's paper.

"Indeed it should," agreed Mr. Hunt, and held up his own card and read from it. "'The Seven Wonders of the World'; yes, indeed."

"Know what they were, I suppose?" said Edward carelessly.

Mrs. Hunt, who attended the Excelsior more for its social than for its instructive side, beamed. She liked this friendliness of this personable young man.

"No, we *don't*," said Mrs. Hunt, frankly and invitingly.

"Tell you if you like," said Edward, nonchalantly easing his collar.

Mr. Hunt gave him a keen look. "Eh, you know them?" inquired Mr. Hunt.

"Oh, rather," said Edward, "rather. Let me see." He spread out the fingers of one hand and ticked them off with the other. "The Pyramids of Egypt, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon —" With the ease of one repeating household words he ran off six; with admirably studied effect paused before the seventh: "And, and, let me see; dear me, how stupid of me; ah, yes, of course; and seventh the Pharos of Alexandria."

"*Well!*" exclaimed Mrs. Hunt; and it was perfectly clear from the tone of her "*Well!*" and from the admiring gaze at Edward with which she accompanied it that she was far less impressed by the wonderful Seven than by the fact of this likeable young man thus familiarly knowing them. Mr. Hunt also gazed upon Edward with an obvious respect; and divers other members of the Excelsior near about who had inclined their ears towards Edward's voice and for the benefit of whose ears Edward had very kindly raised his voice, smiled and nodded thanks and were heard to whisper,

"Very clever young man that young Edward Bryant, you know."

It was a thoroughly impressive little triumph for Edward and Edward was immensely pleased with himself. "By Jove, I'll stick to those cigarettes in future," said Edward to himself gratefully; and happy chance, once more, came to his aid to rescue him from an appalling catastrophe, to the brink of which, in the midst of his satisfaction, Mrs. Hunt's next words suddenly projected him.

"And what," said Mrs. Hunt, loud and clear, "and what *was* that last one, that Pharos of Alexandria?"

Poor Edward! He hadn't a notion, not the faintest glimmer of an idea.

Round came all the near-by heads, forward bent the purposeful head of Mr. Hunt.

Poor Edward! But then the happy chance; the lights went down; the chairman got up.

"Why," said Edward, "the Pharos, of course — Hush. Just beginning. You'll hear in a minute."

That is the prelude to the story.

"The Seven Wonders of the World," began the lecturer, "as of course the members of a society such as this need no telling, were —"

Edward, after the first few sentences, heard never a word. He was day-dreaming. He was castle building. He was thinking how magnificent was that moment when all the near-by heads, and especially the well-to-do, solid heads of Mr. and Mrs. Hunt, were first listening to him and then with respect gazing

upon him; and he was seeing himself climbing up in the world, always thus listened to, always thus respectfully gazed upon, rapidly gaining place, power and wealth; and he was observing particularly in the admiring throng a beautiful girl whose hero he was and to whose feet his triumphs would be brought; and he was going over the road practically and deliciously, step by step, noting his swift advancement in the shipping office where, at present, his salary was four pounds a week; and he was watching himself working desperately hard to achieve this swift advancement; and he was hearing himself say to the lovely creature who adored him, "Fancy, darling, when we met I was getting four pounds a week and now it's forty, two thousand a year!" And he was wafted from all this on to concentration on the lovely creature, creating her (for she did not exist) and imagining her; and he was thinking all this when suddenly he found to his amazement, so vividly and at such length had he been thinking it, that the lecture was over, the lights up, and the chairman making an announcement.

He came to himself and listened.

The Committee of the Excelsior Literary Society, the chairman was saying, had much pleasure in adopting the lecturer's suggestion and offering a prize — "of Five Guineas," said the chairman impressively (applause) — for the best essay on the Eighth Wonder of the World.

"Let it be granted," said the chairman, "as our friend Euclid says (applause) that those — er — creations of the ancients were the Seven Wonders of the

World, we moderns, content, for the purpose under notice, with a single choice, surely can place beside them an eighth which, having regard to the enormous field of modern science and invention, incontestably will out-do them all. The lecturer has touched on several modern wonders from which members of the Excelsior can take their choice; he has left unsaid many that will instantly occur to you —— ”

Edward's mind again was swinging away. He would go in for this competition; he would win it; he would stand up there and read his paper to echoes of applause. The Eighth Wonder? What could it be? What should he choose? Wireless? The turbine engine? The aeroplane?

The lights, as has been said, were turned up. Edward's position in the hall was at the extreme end of one of the two horns into which the chairs were drawn forward in semicircle about the lecturer's table. Edward thus looked directly upon the faces of the members seated at the further horn of the semicircle and all of a sudden, lifting up his eyes in his cogitation—the Eighth Wonder? What? Which? The Eighth Wonder?—All of a sudden, hitting him with a shock, and holding him with a breathless catch, Edward saw The Eighth Wonder of the World seated over against him!

The Eighth Wonder of the World wore a brown dress and held on her lap a brown hat trimmed with brown velvet. She had come in, evidently, while the lecture was in progress and the room in darkness, for she certainly had not been there when Edward last

could see in that direction and as certainly Edward never before had seen her. By Jove, he would not have forgotten her if he had, nor been caused, in his day-dreaming, to invent the lovely face that had been necessary to his dreams. Not his fondest dream ever had imagined anything so lovely as this Eighth Wonder that now he saw.

She was soft and brown; that is how Edward (no artist in words) to himself described her. By brown he meant the general colouring of her face and her hair and her dress; and by soft he meant the gentle loveliness of her expression, the lovely yielding slimness that her young figure seemed to have, the gentle roundness of her bosom, the freshness of her slightly parted lips, the intelligence, the tenderness, the gleams of fun within those jewelled eyes of hers, set in their pools of white, fringed with their long, dark lashes — yes, by soft he meant the virginal and lovely slip she was, whose virgin loveliness called to each fibre of his masculinity to hold, shield, cherish, protect, encompass with his strength, dower with all his goods, fight for, fend for, keep from the smallest hurt, adore.

This, I admit, was pretty good going for the young man Edward in the clap of a single eyeshot; but if you will reflect upon the awe unquestionably struck into their beholders by the Seven Wonders of the World you will be generous, I am sure, in your estimate of the effect upon Edward (a nice, simple-minded young fellow) of this astounding revelation to him of the Eighth.

The Eighth Wonder of the World! Her hair was

drawn back from her forehead and brought forward in a very mysterious way (Do they gum it or drive pins clean into their skulls, or what? *I* never know) over her ears; and this gave to her face an aspect at once benign and piquante, serene and roguish, challenging and calm. Her feet were beautifully shod in shining patent-leather shoes and ran up through lovely ankles in biscuit-coloured stockings of silk. She was about nineteen. Her name was Clarry. (Clarry, or Clarissa, Hunt, by the way; daughter, as it most surprisingly turned out, of those two whom Edward had so greatly impressed).

And now that is enough for just a moment about Clarry *as Clarry*; and I italicize that because the whole point of this story is to discover to you what I have long discovered for myself, namely that the Eighth Wonder of the World (but I would put it far higher and call it the First) is every girl of Clarry's years and of the years immediately behind and in front of Clarry's. You can put any girl you like into this story. They all are Clarrys (in some one's eyes); they all are the Eighth Wonder (in mine and soon, I hope, in yours).

The Eighth Wonder is to be seen in every city throughout the civilised globe, whose most stupendous of all wonders she is, and in every walk of life, high or low, except the very highbred, swagger ones (too frightening for me) but she is easiest (and loveliest) to recognise at about six o'clock of the evening in the cities when swarming out she comes from the business

houses where she has been tied up, into the streets where much I love to wander, and wandering, watch her bring her wonder to my eyes.

Yes, that is when their wonder is most patent, the wonder of the Eighth Wonders of the World, when they come shining out from their grim prisons; poured from their doorways to the sombre pavements like brightly coloured beads tipped from a box across a dull-hued tablecloth; dispersed among and starred among the trudging crowds like fireflies lighting in vivid glints a forest. They all are lovely, every one, even those that in the loosest test would pass no beauty standards; lovely in their youth, lovely in their eager mien, lovely in their metamorphosis from parts of huge machines (the world's work) to individual hopes and fears and faiths and loves (the world's high holiday). They all are wonderful. There is, as out they come and shining home they go, no man they pass — not all your savants or your laurelled — can of his powers give to weariness what of their graces these can give; can of his brain or of his hands bequeath mankind what of their bodies these, its mothers preordained, maintaining it, bequeath it. All lovely, all wonderful; and loveliest and wondrous most that one, as often I have seen, who to a lover waiting there emerges, and goes to him and amidst all the thronging crowds raises her face to him, and kisses him and takes his arm, and turns along the crowded streets with him; and lo, no longer crowded, fretful, anxious are that lover's ways but Paradise.

The Eighth Wonder!

Edward, mind you, only by degrees spread over many months came to realise that Clarry was the Eighth Wonder of the World; but he knew from the very first that she was by far the most wonderful thing that had ever come into his life or into anybody's life; and within a few weeks was knowing it ascendingly by enjoying in her company that Paradise of being greeted by her (she used to emerge to him when he was able to be there from the solicitor's office in which she was employed) and of kissing her and taking her arm and walking with her, which I have shown to present the Eighth Wonders at their most wonderful and loveliest.

It all happened with astounding swiftness and simplicity. At one moment Edward in the lecture hall was for the first time in his life staring upon the Eighth Wonder; at the next, to the stupefaction of Edward, the Eighth Wonder had crossed the room directly to him, greeted her parents and by her parents been introduced to him; at the next he was walking towards their home with the Hunts and with the Eighth Wonder; and at a moment advanced some weeks in point of time, but seeming to Edward, existing as it were in a trance, to be but a portion of the very same night, he was the accepted suitor of the Eighth Wonder and their marriage in immediate prospect.

Only bits of all this can be selected for telling, and I would choose those bits on the one hand as they seemed to Edward peculiar to himself and never to have happened to anybody before, and on the other hand as they are common to all the Eighth Wonders

and to all those thrice favoured men on whom not only discovery but possession of an Eighth Wonder is bestowed.

There was that first night walking home with the Hunts and with Clarry. Four abreast could not be walked on the pavements they followed, and it was contrived by the parents that Edward walked part of the way with Mr. Hunt and part of the way with Mrs. Hunt, never with Clarry. The Hunts, you see, had not the glimmer of a notion that they were the temporary owners of the Eighth Wonder of the World, still less that this clever and fascinating young man was with them solely because they owned the Eighth Wonder and because he proposed to sunder from them the Eighth Wonder and have it for his own. They thought he was with them because it was their company he desired; and Edward at every step of the way to their house upheld them in this belief. While he walked with Mrs. Hunt he talked to her on all her subjects, from the complexities of the domestic servant problem to the dangers of the damp night air, the ailments arising therefrom, and the divers other ailments to which Mrs. Hunt was most grievously subject, with an earnest sympathy which completely won her heart. While he walked with Mr. Hunt, he received the views of Mr. Hunt on the political and foreign situations, on the state of trade and on the sinister traces of Bolshevism in the local Borough Council, with a deference, an interest, and a profound thoughtfulness (voiced principally in a succession of "I agree, sir; I agree absolutely and entirely, sir") that was in the highest

degree gratifying to Mr. Hunt and that caused Mr. Hunt, on arrival at the Hunt demesne, to bid him enter for a glass of wine and a piece of cake, and on his departure from the Hunt demesne to bid him call again, not only "whenever you like" which, as you know, by itself means never, but on a definite date, the morrow, Sunday, for midday dinner, which as you can guess meant a very great deal (to Edward).

"A thoroughly nice, well-informed, good-mannered, clever, agreeable young fellow," said Mr. Hunt, returning to Mrs. Hunt at the departure of Edward.

These adjectives were cordially endorsed and others added to them by Mrs. Hunt, and their effect, and something mysteriously additional to their effect, was formulated also in the mind of Clarry, left in the hall by her father to close the door upon the departing Edward. The earnest attention that Edward had paid to the owners of the Eighth Wonder had enabled him to exchange very few sentences with the Eighth Wonder herself. Those they now exchanged, though few and inconsequent, were protracted by the enormous difficulty which Edward felt in tearing himself away from the presence of the Eighth Wonder, and they had, few and inconsequent as they were, the curious effect of sending Edward away, when at last he removed himself, in a mingling of rapture and of envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness. The rapture resulted from the discovery to him of the Eighth Wonder of the World; the envy, hatred, malice and all uncharitableness arose out of the very last words by her to him addressed.

"I expect I know," said the Eighth Wonder (her almost last words), "who will get that prize that was offered at the meeting to-night."

"Who?" said Edward, trembling.

He was trembling by reason of emotions aroused in him by the hope that the Eighth Wonder would reply "You," and by apprehension of all the delicious emotions that would flood within him if she did thus reply. But her reply, as it turned out, caused him to tremble with emotions very much of another kind.

"I feel sure," replied the Eighth Wonder, "that it will be that Mr. Gilray. He *is* clever, don't you think? I've often thought what a striking face he has; quite the most intellectual looking of all the members. Oh, yes, I should think he's almost certain to win it."

Edward, who for twelve minutes had been morally unable to remove himself from the house, suddenly was able physically to remove himself in much less than one; and he walked home, as has been said, on the one part in rapture, on the other boiling with a furious and most terrible hatred of the intellectual looking Mr. Gilray.

Then there was the time (and it was not so very long afterwards) that Edward was walking with the Eighth Wonder on a Saturday afternoon in a secluded tract of Hampstead Heath. The Eighth Wonder had taken off her gloves and was carrying them in her right hand. Her left hand, bare, brown, small, capable, exquisite, was hanging next to the right hand of Edward and Edward suddenly and ever so lightly, be-

cause he was terribly afraid and because the stupendous thumping of his heart could be heard, as he believed, all over the heath, enclosed her hand in his.

“Do you mind?” said Edward, and hated himself for the voice in which he said it, because it came out, to his very great surprise and vexation, as a husky squeak.

She did not appear to mind. She said no word. The only sign she gave was a faint tide of colour in her cheeks.

The thumping of Edward's heart now could be heard, as he believed, not only throughout the heath but throughout the boundaries of the entire parish of Hampstead. He interlaced the five fingers of his hand between the five fingers of the hand of the Eighth Wonder of the World and held it palm to palm. Then Edward raised the hand thus held and brought the forearm of the Eighth Wonder of the World within his own forearm, and with his forearm and his elbow pressed her forearm and her elbow to his side, and with his five fingers and his palm most tenderly and yet most firmly pressed the five fingers and the palm that were hers. Then Edward, terrified that the thumping of his heart could now be heard at Charing Cross, and that certainly it would burst within his breast and suffocate him unless something were done, stopped and did the only thing that could possibly avert so disastrous a calamity. He stopped and stooped and placed his lips upon the lips of the Eighth Wonder of the World; and immediately the duress of his heart was stayed and he knew that he owned the Eighth Wonder of the

World and he felt, furthermore, that he owned the whole of the round world whose Eighth Wonder she was, its riches, its glories, and all that therein is.

I am a little wrong in saying it was at this moment that Edward knew he owned the Eighth Wonder because, as I have said, though he knew from the first moment he set eyes upon her that Clarry was more wonderful than anything he had seen or imagined, it was not until some time later that he realised her position in the wonders of the world, and this realisation was yet to come. But I knew it, as I have told you, all along, and in reporting moments supreme as was that in which he placed his lips to hers, I get rather flurried and cannot help anticipating things a little.

Then there was the time — firmly affianced now, the blessings of the parental Hunts thick about them and negotiations already in train for the rental of a tiny little house in Clapham Common — the time when they quarrelled. This terrible event took place when Edward was entertaining Clarry to an afternoon in the tea gardens of a riverside hotel at Hampton Court, and it was because when Edward, for the purpose of this expedition met the Eighth Wonder of the World at Waterloo station he saw upon the head of the Eighth Wonder of the World a hat which filled him with terror and dismay.

I am sorry I cannot describe this hat, but I have no aptitude whatever for fashion-plate stuff. Edward certainly could not describe it; he had no words in which to express what he thought about it. But I have

a profound sympathy with the feelings of all Edwards in matters like this, so I say simply that it was a hat which attracted attention, and I leave it at that.

As lovely Clarry advanced across the platform to him, Edward, staggered, saw several people look at her hat, and when they got into the train and the train began to move, he saw the eyes of all the persons in the compartment to be fixed upon the hat. Not only that, and goodness knows that was terrible enough for Edward, but the eyes of these persons seemed also to convey to Edward (with a sly jeer) that he, and not Clarry, was responsible for the hat. Edward broke out into a profuse perspiration which lasted the whole afternoon and which, as you can well imagine, caused him the greatest discomfort.

Far worse became the affair when they arrived at the tea gardens. Clarry was by now well aware that something was wrong, but she had no idea what was wrong; and when Edward, first very agitatedly and then very imperiously and sharply, refused to sit at a table in the middle of the gardens and insisted upon one remote and obscure, Clarry also became vexed, and the quarrel, though not yet joined, was afoot. Edward throughout the meal spoke scarcely a word. Obscure though the table was, it appeared to the distorted imagination of Edward to be by far the most conspicuous of all the tables and to be, moreover, the one and only centre of observation of the occupants of all the tables. So distorted and inflamed indeed had the imagination of Edward by now become that it appeared to him, not only that the hundreds of eyes fixed upon him were ac-

cusing him of responsibility for the hat, but that in some mysterious way the hat was not in fact upon Clarry's head but upon his own head.

In this plight a new terror descended upon Edward and a new darkness upon the relations between himself and the Eighth Wonder of the World. The table, chosen for its obscurity but affording no obscurity, was now seen by Edward to be furthest of all the tables from the exit from the garden. Edward determined within himself that no power on earth would induce him to walk through that chattering and giggling crowd with that hat, as it were, upon his head. He determined that he would sit there, if need be, till closing time. Not at the point of a revolver would he move from there.

"I thought," said Clarry presently, after an enormous interval in which she had twice suggested movement and twice suffered rebuff, "I thought we were going in a boat on the river?"

To this and to further interrogation on the point there were responded by Edward only some vague, indistinct mumblings. Clarry received these as long as, and indeed longer than, even an Eighth Wonder of the World can be expected to receive them; and then said Clarry, incisively, "I would very much like to know what it is that's the matter with you this afternoon. Perhaps you'll tell me?"

"Oh, well, if you want to know," said Edward, stung, "I'm not going on the river with you in that hat, and that's flat."

No rose in the whole of that garden was anything

like as red as the redness now seen upon the face of the Eighth Wonder of the World.

"Oh," said the Eighth Wonder; and about a year afterwards, "I thought there was something wrong," said she.

"There's nothing wrong with *me*," said Edward.

No ice cream in the whole of those ice creams being eaten in those gardens was anything like as icy as the iciness that now froze the voice of the Eighth Wonder of the World.

"Thank you," said the Eighth Wonder of the World.

She arose and moved with icy dignity, like a moving pillar of salt, through the crowded tables. Edward followed her. He had "let her know" (as he expressed it to himself) and he was glad that he had let her know and he did not care now if two dozen of her hats were to be seen upon his head.

He travelled back with her in the train and he conducted her to her gate and in the whole journey no word was spoken. At the gate, "Good-bye," said Edward. "Good-bye," said the Eighth Wonder of the World, and turned away.

"Oh, by the way," said Edward offhandedly, "I find I sha'n't be able to come in to lunch to-morrow."

"Oh, and I've just remembered," said Clarry brightly, "that I sha'n't be able to go with you to that concert on Monday night. Hope you don't mind."

"Not a bit," said Edward cheerfully. "I expect I can get some one else to come."

"I'm sure you can," said Clarry. "I'll send you the tickets."

"Yes, do," said Edward.

Clarry did; and the very extraordinary thing (to me) is that Edward, though he was expecting the tickets, believed they would not come; and when they did come tore them into ten thousand pieces and dashed them upon the floor; and that Clarry, though she was not expecting Edward to lunch on Sunday, believed that he *would* come and watched for him from her bedroom window all the morning and then reported herself stricken with a most terrible headache (through eyestrain, I suppose) and wanting no food and threw herself on her bed and used two clean handkerchiefs and one soiled one; yes, so it must have been eyestrain.

There followed for Edward two days and two nights (the nights of length never known before except in the Polar regions) during which stubbornness and contrition waged terrible war within him, devouring him utterly so that he became haggard and consumed. On the third day, the battle being determined, and the field wherein it had been waged ravaged and laid waste, the field was in the evening removed by the faltering legs of Edward to the pavement outside Clarry's office and posted there, quaking; and at six o'clock precisely appeared the Eighth Wonder of the World and saw the wasted field and rushed straight into it and with tears so watered it and with happy cries so fostered it that it sprang into blossom with a shout and gave forth groans, laughter, penitence, promise and love an hundredfold.

The round world and all that therein is had, at that moment, no lovelier sight.

"I'll never wear that wretched hat again," cried the Eighth Wonder of the World, clinging.

"I swear I'll never go out with you if you don't wear it every day for a year," cried Edward, clinging.

"Now then, please," said a policeman; "can't stand here all night, you know." (For, mind you, this was bang in the middle of the pavement in Basinghall Street, City, at the evening rush hour.)

Then there was the time when they were married and set up in the tiny little house in Clapham Common, the interior of which, immediately you opened the front door, came at you like a blow in the face with an overpowering smell of new linoleum and new furniture, but with a blow, nevertheless, that was to Edward infinitely more fragrant than ever the waft of violets across a woodland, and to the Eighth Wonder of the World lovelier far than any savour in the general opinion of all Eighth Wonders considered loveliest.

Edward, during his hours at his office, used, a dozen times a day, to sniff up the memory of this linoleum-furniture mixture within his nostrils; and Clarry, who, in order, as it were, to keep the smell going, had given up her office, could not bear to be out of its range for more than the shortest possible time, and used to hurry home from her shopping or from her visits to her mother, and open the front door and inhale it as a sailor, long absent from the wave, inhales the sea.

This was the time when Edward, not yet quite

arrived at realisation that Clarry was the Eighth Wonder of the World, advanced towards that realisation in daily progression. Supremely wonderful as he had always known Clarry to be, it was within the aroma of the new linoleum and the new furniture that her wonder was most fully disclosed to him. Edward was now earning six pounds a week, and he found, to his enormous astonishment, that the wonders of the Eighth Wonder of the World caused six pounds a week to go further, and to leave a larger balance when all was covered, for the necessities of two persons than ever he had contrived to make it go or leave for the necessities of one. And then, too, was the extraordinary business about his dreams — those dreams of which I have given evidence at the Excelsior Literary Society in which he saw himself bounding along to place, power and wealth.

These dreams, before he became the owner of the Eighth Wonder of the World, were in the nature, as it were, of a flying magic carpet which skimmed beautifully overhead and was delicious to watch, but was immeasurably out of reach and of no practical quality whatever. The Eighth Wonder of the World, placing one hand within the hand of Edward and stretching up the other, captured and brought down the skimming carpet and transformed it into a treadmill on which Edward laboured heavily and by no means always with pleasure, but yet unquestionably with marked advancement on the road to success.

In instance, there was the matter of Spanish. Edward, lying on his back one evening on the new and

powerfully smelling couch in the new and powerfully smelling sitting room, and watching the lovely skimming of his magic carpet overhead, told Clarry that his firm did a very large South American business, and that one day he was going to start learning Spanish with a view to advancing himself by getting into the foreign side of the house. This "one day" on which Spanish was to be begun had been in the mind of Edward for five and a half years. By the wonder of the Eighth Wonder of the World it now was astoundingly caused to be the very next day after that on which this announcement was made to her. Edward, returning to the heavenly smell on the morrow, found the Eighth Wonder of the World awaiting him with the textbooks of a course in Spanish conducted by a school of foreign languages. A lesson a day was tabulated by this course. Fired by the wonder of the Eighth Wonder of the World, Edward took the first seven lessons at one enormous gulp on that very same night; on the twelfth day following he did half a lesson; on the fifteenth day the fag-end of a lesson of two days before; and on the twentieth day had been five days without doing any lesson and had no intention of ever doing any lesson again.

It was at this point that the Eighth Wonder of the World very seriously exerted her wonders and put them upon Edward. The words in which they were received by Edward abashed Edward and fired Edward; abashed and fired him anew whenever (which was frequently) he wished that Spain and the whole South American continent might be sunk in their respective

oceans and never again emerge; and ultimately landed him at the stage in which he addressed to the head of his firm a letter in perfect Spanish, pointing out his masterly knowledge of the Spanish tongue and suggesting that this knowledge should be placed at the disposal of the firm, whose interests he had so earnestly at heart, and begged to remain, Sir, your obedient servant, Edward Bryant.

And it was so.

"You know," said Edward, bursting with joy at the very considerable advancement which shortly followed this letter, "you know, I absolutely never should have got this except for you."

He was right.

Thus and in many similar ways were manifested to Edward the wonders of the Eighth Wonder of the World; and then there came the time (and this is the last of them) when broke upon him in actual fact the knowledge that the Eighth Wonder of the World she was.

This was the time when mysterious and alarming things began to happen in the tiny house at Clapham Common, and when (one night at the climax of them) the smell of the new linoleum and the new furniture, distinctly diminished by now but kept alive by furniture polish, was banished and overpowered by smells which Edward had hitherto connected with dental parlours and medical consulting rooms.

This was the time when the Eighth Wonder of the World spent a considerable portion of her days in

resting on the sofa; when Mrs. Hunt came to take up residence with her daughter; when strange packages came into the house and an enormous amount of needle work was constantly in progress; and when finally, on the morning of the climax of these proceedings, there entered the place a dragon, grey, stern and grim, disguised as a maternity nurse, and carrying a brown bag of, to Edward, very sinister aspect. This dragon, divesting herself of her outer garments, appeared before Edward in the sitting room so stiffly starched that she crackled in every inch of her person and at every step of her tread, causing him to quail, and told him he had better go out for the evening; which Edward, though quailing, refusing to do, the dragon commanded him to remain in the sitting room and departed, crackling.

Next the house was entered by a doctor, carrying a black bag even more sinister than the brown bag of the crackling dragon, and there followed now for Edward, incarcerated in the sitting room and hearing always mysterious sounds and sometimes very lamentable and heartbreaking sounds, an evening more terrible than any he had ever imagined.

He knew that Clarry was in most dreadful extremity; and for the reason that his imagination never yet had approached this extremity that was hers, he explored it now with the terrors of one awakening to find himself entombed. He was assured that Clarry must die. He never had thought upon the mysteries of nature, much less upon those agonies in which, touching humanity, her mysteries are encompassed,

and his reason, that never had reasoned with them, cried out against them in hatred and in dread. What was Divinity that such things could be? Sometimes he prayed and sometimes — did not pray; sometimes, bowed upon the table, in impotence he beat his head upon his hands; sometimes, pacing the floor, in dread he held his breath and paused to listen.

The door opened and his heart stopped. The crackling dragon crackled in. He had been smoking pipe after pipe, and all said to him or done for him by the crackling dragon was "Priff! Praff! You have a terrible atmosphere in here!"; and the window flung up with such violence that it appeared likely to crash through the ceiling; and something snatched up from the sideboard; and the crackling dragon crackled out again.

It was winter. It became icily cold, but he did not dare shut the window because, even in his dire distress, he still was frightened of the crackling dragon and was afraid lest she should return. He was thinking now over his vile behaviour in the matter of that lamentable business of the hat; and he was wondering if Clarry, dying, was remembering his abominable conduct then displayed towards her; and he was in the last depths of misery and grief; and then to his extreme terror he heard the doctor departing. Going without speaking to him! Was it that he did not wish to break the news? He blundered to the door and in his agitation scarcely could open it; and then opened it and caught the doctor.

"Hullo!" said the doctor. "Didn't know you were in. Thought they'd turned you out. Well, it's all gone

splendidly. She's fine. You're a happy father and all that. Congratulate you. Son and heir. Splendid, what! Good night, good night!"

He returned to the sitting room. Inexpressible tumult disorganised him. He first was on his knees in gratitude. He next was on his feet in ecstasy. Clarry! A son! He was there hours as it appeared to him, torn by these new stresses, plunged from them back to his earlier anguish, then to his new tumults again, before, at last, a message came to him to release him.

The crackling dragon crackled in.

"Frripp! Frrapp!" said the crackling dragon. "You're terribly cold in here!" slammed down the window with such violence that it appeared likely to crash through the floor; and told him, grudgingly, that he might now go upstairs for one minute — "And no talk, please."

Then he went into the room, and even the crackling dragon, noticing his face as he came in and perhaps taking compassion on him, went and crackled herself out in the passage, and Mrs. Hunt went with her; and he was alone with the stupendous and exquisite mystery that was here. And when he saw Clarry lying on the bed, and when he saw lying upon her lovely arm and held against her darling breast the man-child that in mystery and in agony she had delivered out of her body to him, he knew then that she was the Eighth Wonder of the World; and the wonder and the glory of her, and the miracle and mystery of her engulfed him and overcame him; and he fell on his knees by the bed, and bowed down his head and cried very much,

with real tears, dripping; and once he cried (I don't know why) "Oh, my God!"; and once he said, very brokenly, "You are wonderful, wonderful!"; and soon after that they crackled in to him from the passage and got him out and pushed him down the stairs, and he went down wiping his eyes because his eyes were streaming.

That is all. But the point is that he now knew clearly and definitely what until now he had never definitely known, though frequently surmised. And on the very next morning, as he was proceeding to his office, his head enormously high and his chest enormously extended, and as he was perceiving his son, in successive pictures, as Commander in Chief of the British Army, First Sea Lord, Poet Laureate, President of the Royal Academy, Lord Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury, and was debating within himself which of the insignia of these was least unworthy to be borne upon the breast of his son (then weighing seven pounds and fourteen ounces) — as he was doing all this, there came up to him one who accosted him and said "Hullo, Bryant, haven't seen you for years. Do you remember me? I'm Gilray. By Jove, do you know, I believe the last time I saw you was two years ago at the Excelsior Literary Society, when they put up a competition for the best essay on the Eighth Wonder of the World. I got the first prize, you know."

"By Jove," said Edward, "you're welcome to it, old man. I got the Eighth Wonder."

SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER—

SOME TALK OF ALEXANDER—

I

His parents called him Hector. When he and Tom and Harry, his brothers, were tiny things, his pretty young mother used to stand them about the piano and sing old-fashioned songs to them. Presently she would beam at her first-born and cry, "Now Hector's song!" and then the piano would change from the plaintive melodies and thump and jingle out the defiant, blaring strains, and they would all shout:

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander, and such great names as
these . . ."

What fun! How they would all jump about and shout it while his mother laughed and nodded from the piano! What jolly, jolly fun!

But from the age of twelve, when first he went to boarding-school and first heard fully of the redoubtable Trojan whose name he bore, acutely aware by then how ill, how grotesquely, it suited him — from then onwards, all his life, how he hated the name! How he loathed and detested the defiant, blaring tune!

Nobody knew how much he hated the name. He hated it so much that, after that first term at school, when the mortification of the thing was new and bitter

upon him, he never could respond lovingly to the name on his parents' lips. That damped whatever demonstrativeness of affection he ever showed towards his parents, and equally damped whatever depth of affection he ever felt; and neither, as he came out of babyhood, was remarkable. Demonstrativeness and depth, applied to any affair, were two of the many gifts forgotten by the fairies at his christening.

When he was sixteen he was entered with others of his form for the London Matriculation examination. He dreaded the examination, as he always dreaded any ordeal, whether of mind or muscle, but he dreaded much more the public exposure of the hated name entailed by his master checking over the list of candidates before the entries were sent in.

"Tell me if I've got any of your christian names wrong," said the master; and misery descended upon him whose christian name was Hector.

"Abney," read the master. "Abney, John. Allen, Henry James. Bartlett, Phillip. Brown, Arthur George. Bywash, Hector."

A titter ran round the class. All the lusty young barbarians — possible Hectors any of them, but bearing such common names as James and Frank and Charles — all looked and grinned at the crimsoned, gawky youth who bore the name of the most valiant of all the valorous Trojans, and who in every line of his face and figure mocked that name to scorn.

One boy among the grinning desks puffed out his chest and drubbed it, and pointed derisively at the hollow chest of Bywash, Hector; another pantomimed

in the air, and suggested with wordless lips the hateful tune —

“ Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander, and such great names as
these !”

How he hated it ! How he hated his name ! Why, why didn't the master go on ?

The master, an indulgent person — and the formality upon which he was engaged an indulgent interval in the morning's discipline — looked up at the disturbance. He apprehended its cause, and himself contributed a comprehending and sympathetic smile to the mocking grins, whereat the joke was taken up with loud and noisy delight ; and the hatred of his species and of his name, and the smouldering sense of wrong done him by his parents in giving him so hateful a name, flared deeply on Hector's cheeks.

Everybody enjoyed the joke, and the master joined in it, because it *was* a joke that such a fatuous person as Bywash should have such a dashing name as Hector. For Bywash was a notorious ass ; butt of his form ; played no games, had no hobbies, did nothing, knew nothing, chummed with no one, slovenly, shiftless, characterless, gawky, unhealthy — and was called Hector !

Ha, ha ! What a name ! What an ass ! “ Look out, Bywash ! ”

Bywash always flinched and ducked when any one shouted, “ Look out, Bywash ! ” as if he feared something was being chucked at him.

Things very often were chucked at him.

The holidays at this period of his life were not much relief from the unhappiness of school. He passed his time in doing what his father called "lounging about the house." He was not even fond of reading. He wasn't fond of anything. His two brothers were to him precisely of a part with his noisy schoolmates. He was the eldest of the three, but they were at much the better school. They were at Tidborough; he was only at Chovensbury Grammar School. They had won Tidborough scholarships, enabling their education at that famous, and famously expensive, public school to be afforded; he had not won a scholarship, nor ever a prize in his life, and his lot was the grammar school at Chovensbury. Tidborough ranked with Charterhouse, Winchester, and Rugby, and in the holidays Hector's brothers in little ways condescended to Hector with the superiority that any Tidborough boy gave himself over any boy not of the English public schools that can be numbered on the fingers of one hand, let alone of the grammar school at Chovensbury!

Hector accepted this position in regard to his brothers. He always accepted any position. Nothing ever seemed to rouse him, or even to interest him. In the holidays Tom and Harry vigorously kept up their school sports, went to parties, and generally robustly enjoyed themselves within their wide circle of neighbouring friends. Hector mooned about the house.

Then school days ended. Tom went into the Army; Harry floated on scholarships to Oxford, thence to enter the Civil Service. Fine boys; their father was

proud of them. Hector, far from a fine boy, and evincing not even enough of affection, let alone of talent, to make his father proud of him, was got into an office at Tidborough as a clerk, — Hammond's, the big brewers.

His father spoke seriously, though kindly, to him when, at seventeen and a half, he was removed from Chovensbury Grammar School and the clerkship at Hammond's found for him.

“You must begin to assert yourself now, Hector, my boy,” his father told him. “You’ve not done well at school, you know; that’s why you’re going in for this kind of thing, instead of the careers your brothers are launching out on. You could have had any career you liked, you know, Hector — medicine, the law, the Church, the Army — if you had joined hard work and scholarships, as have your brothers, to the very little I am able to provide in the way of money. But you haven’t. Well, well, that’s all over now, my boy. You mustn’t look on this that we’ve found for you as a come-down, you know. There are as great opportunities for getting on in business as ever there are in the professions Tom and Harry have chosen; nowadays, indeed, much greater possibilities. Captains of industry — merchant princes — you know the kind of thing; that’s the goal you must set before yourself, my boy; and if you steadily set it before yourself and apply your every effort to achieving it, why in a very few years we shall have you the envy of your brothers and the pride of your old father and your dear mother. Eh? Come, that’s the programme, isn’t it, my boy? A

fresh start, good prospects, and a fine future. Eh, Hector?"

Hector, listening in his lackadaisical, inattentive sort of way, had responded not a word.

His father asked rather testily, "You like the idea of going into Hammond's, don't you? You see the prospects, don't you?"

"Oh, I don't mind if I do, father," was Hector's response.

His father rather disgustedly closed the interview. "Don't mind if I do!" What a spirit to take it in!

II

Now was the start-in-life period, the period of high youth, and Tom and Harry made much of it. They were a gay, full-blooded and taking pair, much in demand, when at home for their vacations, in all the society round about, and much given to jolly dalliance with the daughters of the countryside. They had between them quite a number of youthful love affairs, blazoned and flickered and gone affairs such as every right young man touches in his student days, and the cause of much genial banter by their proud and happy father. Entirely different the case with Hector. At school neglectful of school sports and interests; now at Hammond's, a young man, nothing was for him in youth's affinities and recreations. He had lodgings in Tidborough. A fortnight in the year was his vacation; he spent it at home (still mooning about the house), and it happened that his fortnight never coincided with the generous vacations of his brothers.

“ Ah, yet doth beauty, like a dial hand,
Steal from his person with no pace perceived.”

As the hands of a clock, ever moving away yet never perceptible in their motion, so — imperceptibly, but very surely — Hector began to move out of relations with his home and with the friends of his home, and new friends he made none. When he was thirty his mother and father died, in the same year. He was distressed, but his distress did not go very deep or last very long. He was not constituted to feel deeply or lastingly. He was very sorry, and there, in a month, was an end of it, and with it the end of much more. That hateful “ Hector ” was now erased; none now to call him it and with it mock him. His brothers were in India, his parents dead, his old home sold. He became “ Bywash ”; by signature, “ H. Bywash.” “ Hector ” was done, for ever.

He left Hammond's. A very few months in that office had sufficed to show this was no budding captain of industry or merchant prince had entered it. Other junior clerks advanced their positions in the firm; Bywash remained where he began. There came, shortly after the death of his parents, a gale of reorganization through Hammond's. Bywash went out before its blast.

He drifted away, much as, twelve years before, he had drifted in; in three years following, bringing him to three and thirty, was in and out of half-a-dozen posts; at thirty-five, at the same level of drab and listless incompetency, he had drifted into the appearance of a permanency at a desk in the office of a firm

of estate agents. Here he earned two pounds a week, and here, which exactly suited him, he merely sat in the office from nine-thirty to six and entered up properties or copied them for clients. It was not an employment at which it was easy to make mistakes, or in which mistakes, if they were made, could be very serious. It was just the donkey-work of the business, and it was useful to the firm to have for the donkey-work a steady, dull, middle-aged man, who did no more than he was required to do, and for doing it wanted no more than he got.

Hector, therefore, suited, and was himself well suited. He had, in addition to his two pounds a week, some ninety pounds a year from investments under his father's will. He had no tastes; his only expenditure was his lodging; he only bought clothes when he came through those he wore. He now was forty and forty was his fitting age. He had never been a boy, never a youth. In boyhood the qualities of boyhood, and in youth the qualities of youth, had been expected of him, and he had never been able to produce them. At forty, nothing was expected of him, and that suited him precisely. At forty, looking upon his purposeless mien, his vacant eyes, and his neglected mind, one might say that the Creator, with high and ardent hopes planning in his own image the young body and the young mind that first was here, had faltered in his interest and abandoned it and gone away. . . .

At forty, H. Bywash had no vices and no virtues. He was negative. Nothing interested him, nothing

caused his pulses to quicken. The result of the Derby or of the Boat Race, the sonnets of Wordsworth, the spires of Tidborough Cathedral springing to the sky, the bustle and gleam of Tidborough's commercial streets by night, when pleasure and business were abroad, or May or October arranging their glories upon the countryside—these things were nothing to H. Bywash. Nothing was anything to him.

And suddenly, at forty, thus circumstanced and thus equipped, astounding and tremendous things began to happen to him.

III

They began with the beginning of his annual fortnight's holiday taken in this forty-first year of his age, — poignant and mysterious and terrific and frightful things: emotions that presented at white heat all those ardent emotions he should have known in his youth and never had known; emergencies that called for all those qualities of mind and muscle, of action and of courage, which in his young manhood he should have developed and husbanded, but whose virtues he had never entertained.

He took this holiday, as he had taken twenty before it, at the great seaport town of Stormouth, an hour's run from Tidborough on the main line from London. No one, observing him waiting on the platform for the down train, would have supposed he was holiday bound. He went on holiday as he went about everything else, listlessly; he spent it lodged in a cheap

room, lounging within doors if the weather were dull, listlessly about the Prince's Park or on the sea-front if fine.

The train roared in. Everybody quickened up and hustled. Some greeted, some took leave; some rushed about for accommodation; some after luggage. Boys bawled newspapers and refreshments. Porters thundered trucks towards and away from the baggage vans. The engine contributed a tremendous and spectacular din of escaping steam. Mr. Bywash, sole emotionless figure, drifted towards the coach that had halted nearest him and drifted in. He scarcely noticed the occupants, a man and a woman, seated side by side opposite him and at the farther corner. The train started. He looked out of the window, seeing, for all the countryside conveyed to his mind, as much or as little as if a blank wall flanked the way.

When the train had run about twenty minutes he altered his position, and made to look across the carriage through the further window. Then he noticed his companions. The man was a huge, obese creature, with a heavy, brutish face, got up in a horsey way, the rough publican or bookmaker type. He had enormous hands, great, big, red, sledge-hammer hands, and his face — the mouth tightly pursed as though he desired to show he had no intention of speaking — held the expression of a malevolent and threatening smile as if there were some ferocious power he had that in his chosen time he would exercise. The whole bulk and coarseness and brutality of the man, the heavy and ferocious aspect that he had, vaguely frightened Mr.

Bywash. It made him feel uncomfortable, alarmed. Why that dominating and repellent mien? . . . Why that mouth thus pursed as though to show he would not speak? . . . Why in his face that cynical presentment of triumph, of power? . . . Why? Uncomfortable, apprehensive, Mr. Bywash slid his eyes to the ferocious man's companion, to the woman; and then knew why; and knew, immediately and poignantly, extraordinary and mysterious and terrible and immoderately alarming sensations.

She was slightly twisted in her seat so that her face was upturned beneath the man's face. Her face was pale. It was pale with a creamy pallor, and it had eyes of dim grey, grey with the pearl and exquisite grey-ness of the last film that lifts above the dawn, and shining stuff about the lower lids. . . . ("Tears!" thought Mr. Bywash dreadfully. "Tears! Oh, my, she's crying!") And she had soft black hair, low on her temples and upon her brow, as shadows on white roses, that stirred and lifted in the window's breeze as fronds in the depths of some clear pool. And she was talking, talking, talking; she was imploring, imploring, imploring; ceaselessly, piteously, frantically. Mr. Bywash could not hear what she was saying; she was speaking very low, and there was the rushing noise of the train; scarcely the murmur of her tone was discernible to him. But all too frightfully clear to him the fact that she was begging, begging, imploring, entreating. It explained the pursed-up lips of that huge and ferocious man. She was imploring a word from him, and he would not speak a word. It explained

that horrible look of his, of triumph and of power that in his chosen time he would exercise. She was in terror of that triumph, in dismay of that power.

Mr. Bywash watched; and watched with all these mysterious and frightful and never-before-experienced feelings swelling and surging within him, and causing him fear (which he had often felt, but never for such a reason) and aching pity, which he never in his life had felt for anybody; and, much worse, bewildering and dizzying emotions—yearnings, longings, cravings, high desires of knight errantry, of brave and reckless actions; and, worse still, born out of these, regret.

Yes, watching the face of that woman, hurt by the stresses it aroused within him, there consumed Mr. Bywash a great pain of regret, of realisation, of mortification. It was regret at all he had never been, and now never could become; it was realisation of all he had missed and now could recover never; it was mortification at all he now was—the nerveless, negligible entity he knew he looked—and at all the fine and shining and valorous things that in the furnace of these emotions he most terribly desired to be, and could not be.

He cried inwardly, he could have cried it aloud, “Oh, dear me!”

He thought, “What could I not be? Oh, what am I?”

There answered him, exultingly blared in the rhythm of the train, over and over again, thumping it out, beating it in:

“Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander, and such great names as
these . . .”

“Oh, my goodness!” He could have jumped out of the train . . .

“Yes, if you had the pluck!”

“Oh, my goodness!” These new and frightful emotions he was suffering had set within him an articulate entity that could talk, and this was the first thing it said. “Yes, you could jump out of the train to stop that song and to still your shame, you could jump out and end it—if you had the pluck. Ha, ha! If you had the pluck!”

And while he writhed it went on: “And if you had the pluck to jump out, Bywash, you wouldn’t want to jump out. If you had the pluck to do that you’d have the pluck to do splendid things here in the carriage, and you’d have the appearance and the strength that goes with pluck. You’d get up. You’d interfere. If need be, you’d strike that hulking brute. You’d protect that poor creature. You’d take her. She would turn to you, Bywash. She would admire you, she would turn to you, she would cling to you, she would love you. You’d take her away. She’d be yours, your own; yours, your darling, and you her dearly loved, her hero—if you had the pluck, Bywash! If only you were not what you have always been. If only you had sought the things in life you’ve never sought. If only you had not missed all you have missed. If only you were not what you have come to be. If only you were your brother Harry, Bywash, or your brother Tom.

If only — but listen to the train, Bywash, you're not hearing it. Listen!"

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander, and such great names as
these..."

He said between his lips, "Oh, my God!"

* * * * *

She was still and ceaselessly at it, imploring, beseeching; and the man basilisk, imperturbable, with never a word, with only that sinister indifference, with only that reserved ferocious threat. Anon she would pause, as in exhaustion of despair, and shrink away into herself; and Bywash would see, and tremble to see, all her wrought-up spirit as it were dissolve away in a piteous sigh, and that shining stuff upon her lower lids fill and discharge itself in a swift crystal flash down her cheeks; and in a moment she would start, as though in panic at the moments suffered to fly empty, and urge herself again towards him, and urge again that desperate prayer, that most piteous entreaty. Once she slid her hand — Bywash saw a wedding ring upon it — timidly upon those huge red hands of the man. It was the gentlest and most touching motion of appeal. The man threw up his hand and jerked hers violently away; and the action tore Bywash to the quick; and it did other — it frightened him anew. Those sledge-hammer hands; the sight of them and the thought of their power alarmed him even more than did the man's ferocious face. The horrible instruments, those hands, of all the horrible violences that face might do.

“Interfere!” mocked the new voice within Mr. Bywash. “Look at those butcher hands of his and interfere. Go on!”

Bywash bit his lips.

Once while he stared, and while like one entombed searching escape vainly he sought for courage, the man looked up and directed upon him a full gaze, and Bywash dropped his eyes and turned away his head, and louder than before the beaten rhythm of the train announced:

“ . . . and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander, and such great names as
these.”

He groaned.

In a little he screwed up courage to look again; and he watched now warily and ready to slip away his eyes at an instant's warning. “Imagine it,” mocked the voice. “Imagine it; you daren't even be caught watching!” And once — and this was the most frightful and bitterest moment of all — once the woman ceased her entreaty and made with her hands a little frantic motion of despair and looked swiftly about her in obvious quest of help. And Bywash was the sole other person there. And her eyes just fled a moment on his face — fled, and were gone, and she made again that little frantic motion of despair.

Oh, bitterest moment and of all most frightful! That glance at him and that immediate turning from him! As if a mirror it had been he saw therein his negligible and useless self. If only he had been Tom,

if only he had been Harry, if only he had been any other than this he had become!

“Oh, my goodness!” cried Bywash to himself.

IV

The train ran into Stormouth. He leaned from the window to turn the handle of the door. It was too stiff for his feeble wrist. He never before had noticed how puny were his arms. The man pushed him unceremoniously aside, flicked round the latch without an effort, and stepped out. The woman followed. Her skirts brushed Bywash. Her knees touched his. It was the first contact with a woman that he had ever so much as noticed. It thrilled him dreadfully. He made a great effort. He said — and knew it as he said it for the throaty sound it was — “Can I help you?”

She did not hear. How should she, terrified as he had been lest the man should hear? She did not hear. She was gone. She was passing up the platform in the man’s wake.

Was he to let her go like this? Oh, not after these terrible and mysterious emotions, this amazing and frightful feeling towards her, that had come at him as unexpected flame burst through an opened door. Oh, not after that! Oh, not with this upon him — these tumults, these revelations, these visions of one great act of glorious courage, these transports of what would then be won — a look, a touch, a word, a bond with her! Not after that! He had baggage, but he let it go; he stumbled out of the

train; and he pressed anxiously through the busy platforms; and he followed the pair out into the street and through many streets.

The man was walking much too fast for her. There was, in his great stride and in the massive hulk of his shoulders the same air of vengeful purpose and of biding power that his mien in the train had presented; there was in her agitated hurrying and in the droop of her slender figure the same pitiable appeal that first had wrung these frightful tumults out of Mr. Bywash's heart. And she was being hurried to her doom! He would get her within doors somewhere, and then ——

Mr. Bywash followed along, keeping safely behind and hating himself for his caution. What was he going to do? He didn't know. But he was trying to nerve himself to something, and he was knowing as he tried that there was nothing in him to respond to nerving. He was experiencing all those ardours and those valors which spring in young manhood and which young manhood, feeling, plants in his breast to be his own — and he never had had any young manhood! He was an island castaway come upon treasure and without means to enjoy it; he was one that had laid up his talent in a napkin, and now sought in vain its yield.

The passage of the pair was through the streets of Stormouth's commercial quarter. Mr. Bywash lost his bearings after many turns. He recovered them again as he found himself approaching the district in which lay that Prince's Park where it had been his habit on former visits to lounge away the hours listening to the band. The couple turned down a street

he remembered walking on his way to the park. The houses here were in a solid row on either side, their doors opening directly on to the pavement by two steps, and before one the pair halted. Mr. Bywash halted also, a dozen doors behind. The man opened the door with a key. Mr. Bywash made a great effort at his nerves, and came a few paces on. The man went up the steps and in. It smote terribly at Bywash's heart that the woman hesitated, faltered. The man turned and caught her arm, dragging her roughly. Mr. Bywash was trembling, but he advanced. As he came abreast of the door it was swung to. He stood there trembling.

He had a glimpse before the door swung; a long, narrow passage, on the left a room belonging to the window against the entrance by which he stood, at the end a flight of stairs. He heard heavy steps up the passage and the stairs creak; a darkening behind the window told him that one had entered there. The man had gone upstairs; the woman was in the room. He looked at the door. His heart beat. The door was not latched. It was open! Even as he looked it began to move in a widening aperture.

He did a most appalling thing.

He crept within the door and stood in the passage. He was shaking with fear. Overhead were heavy movements. In the room beside him was sobbing. "I'm mad. I shall be killed!" thought Mr. Bywash. He went into the room. She was collapsed upon a couch, her arms over its back, her head bowed on her arms. He stood there. He was trembling.

She looked up. She sprung to her feet. "Oh, what is it? Who are you? What do you want?"

He was so shaking, he was so strained with listening for approach from above, his condition was altogether so frightful that he could not speak, not for a full minute, while she stared upon him in amazement. Then he stammered, "Can I help you?"

"Who are you? Who are you?"

"I was in the train with you."

"But what do you *want*? What are you doing here? I don't understand. What is it you *want*?"

"I was in the train. I saw what was going on with you. I ——"

Her eyes were round and staring in incomprehension. She struck her hands together, bewildered. "But what do you *want*?"

The moments were flying. He seemed to have been hours in this perilous position. At any instant might come descent upon the stairs. He was shaking. He said, "I want to help you."

She understood. Her eyes that had been wide enlarged yet more. He knew perfectly well her thought, the absurd and futile spectacle he presented! If only he were like Tom! If only he were like Harry! He knew her thought; and she spoke and gave him her thought in its dreadful bitterness. "You! *You!* You must be mad — you *must* be."

It was awful to hear. His face twitched. He said with a catch in his voice, "I know. I know. But I want to. I want to. I saw you. I couldn't bear it. I felt for you. I want to. I want to."

And wider yet her eyes.

Then she made a quick step to him and put her hands on his wrists and pressed him away. "Go! Go! Go at once. While you can. You are mad — mad to be here."

She was terrified for him, and her terror joined and urged his own. But she was touching him! Her hands were on his hands, her face was close to his, the faint and stirring perfume of her flesh. He stood his ground. For a brief instant, as one in flush of wine, he forgot his fears, "I want to help you. I want to."

She stood away and wrung her hands. "Oh, what can you do? What can you do? *You?* Go, go! He'll kill you. He'll kill you."

And terror struck across her face, "Listen!"

The change in her countenance, and that hissed, dreadful word, froze him. He listened. Footsteps on the stairs above. He turned and fled.

Outside and down the street, his thoughts went: Still, he had done it! Craven in that flight of his — still, he had done it! He had gone in. He had spoken to her. Surely that was brave? Surely it was? Yes, it was. He had done that much, that terrific and appalling much. He could not then be utterly, not utterly, abandoned. True, by that craven flight there were confirmed to him all those lamentable exposures of himself revealed in the railway carriage. True, he was wretched and no man. He knew it now. Still, he had done it. . . . He clung on to that.

Now to do more. He went to the station and claimed his bag, carried it to the street of his adven-

ture and from the corner surveyed the road. In the fanlight of several doorways "Apartments" was to be seen. There was the house, just by that lamp standard. He walked towards it on the other side, and at a house three doors opposite inquired for a room, stipulating it must overlook the street, and obtained it.

He seated himself in the window and watched.

Early on the following morning, again watching, he saw the man come out. The man could not possibly see him, but he caught his breath and shrunk away behind the curtain. How huge he looked! How brutal! Those frightful hands swinging by his sides!

About midday the woman appeared. She carried a shopping bag. He took up his hat and went downstairs and followed.

She made purchases in two or three shops. He kept away on the further side, his eyes adoring. Now she passed away from the shopping streets and her direction became the direction of the park. If only she were to go there! She was! She was! She entered the park, and he followed.

She went to a secluded seat and took it; and Bywash went up to her and she recognized him.

Now, now began the amazing days! Now life, as a walled city opening its gates to one all night without, raised its portals and Bywash entered.

V

For a long period into that second meeting her part was solely of utter incomprehension. She simply

could not understand Mr. Bywash, and he was so manifestly the futile thing he looked that she made no pretence of understanding him. She might have been afraid of his approaches; but no living creature could possibly be afraid of Mr. Bywash. She might have been indignant at his presumption; but his extraordinary manner did not arouse indignation. That was just it; he was so utterly out of keeping with the part he played. And what *was* the part he played? She simply could not comprehend. Over and over again she said to him, he standing there before her, "But I don't *understand*. I simply can't. What is it you *want*? *Why* are you speaking to me? I can't understand."

And he could not explain. He could only stammer perfectly meaningless things. He wanted to say all sorts of things, and could not say them. He was suffering all sorts of emotions, manifested by a lump in his throat, by mistiness before his eyes, and he could not possibly express them. And she kept on with that, "But what is it you *want*? *Why* are you speaking to me?" — telling him as plainly as if she were saying it what a figure he looked.

A moisture dimmed his eyes. She saw it. She said quickly: "I *am* so sorry; I really am; but really I simply cannot understand. I can't. Believe me, how sorry I am."

He had to wipe his eyes. This kind note in her voice . . . It worsened his plight.

He said, "The truth is just that I want to talk to you. I've never spoken to a woman — for that reason

— in my life before. I saw you in that carriage yesterday, and I saw how wretched you were, and I felt, I simply can't tell you how I felt for you. I've never felt sorry for any one or cared in the least what happened to any one, in all my life before. I felt for you — I can't tell you. I can't explain it even to myself — how it happened so suddenly, how I felt it so frightfully. I can't tell you. I wanted to interfere, to say something, somehow to help you. I didn't dare. You can see what I am. You saw yesterday when I bolted out of your house what I am. It's no good trying to hide it. You can see for yourself. Any one can. I wanted to interfere. I didn't dare. I followed you. I had to. I've told you why. It was just what came over me so frightfully when I looked up at you in the carriage. So I had to follow. And then I went in. I did do that. Of course I bolted. I bolted directly I heard him coming. It's no good trying to hide what I am. But that I did go in — that shows you, I do hope it shows you, how frightfully I felt for you, how frightfully I do feel for you."

He ended, "That's all. It's just what I've tried to tell you. It's just that I've never spoken to a woman in my life — oh, do please let me talk to you. It's incredible that I can be of any help to you. But you never know. Perhaps I can. If only I could ——"

She said, "Oh, do sit down. It is extraordinary, this. Even now I can't quite — But indeed I do thank you very much for wanting to help me. I'm glad to talk to you. If you were any one else I shouldn't dare. But you — it doesn't seem to matter with you.

You don't mind my saying that, do you? It really doesn't seem to matter. And I *am* glad to talk to you. There's no one I'm ever allowed to talk to. When you saw me in the carriage — you want to know about that, don't you? — when you saw me, I'd been running away. It was the second time I'd tried. He came after me and caught me. He was bringing me back."

Mr. Bywash said, "He looked as though he was going to —— Does he b——" He hardly could frame the dreadful word. "Does he beat you?"

She pushed back to the elbow the sleeve of one arm. He saw bruising, scars, and he felt tortured. If only he were like Tom! If only he were Harry! If only he were any other man than this he was!

They began, from then, to meet every day. She told him her husband was a street bookmaker, his beat was in the docks quarter. He was out all day until late at night or early in the morning. She never knew at what hour he would come in or in what drunken state he would arrive. Supper always had to be ready for him whatever the hour was, always just ready to the turn, or — she indicated those bruised arms. His business and his companionship were with the roughest men; often he brought dreadful men to the house at night; but every one was afraid of him; he always carried a revolver. (That made Mr. Bywash wince. It was a thing he always remembered.)

She told him her life story. It was difficult to imagine a confidant being made of Mr. Bywash; but misery makes odd companions, and she was abject in misery and in loneliness. Her attitude towards him

was that she welcomed his company as the prisoner in his cell the timid mouse.

She told him all about herself. Her father had been a Master in the Merchant Service.

“Why, my father was in the Navy,” cried Mr. Bywash. It seemed to make a bond between them. “In the Royal Navy; he was a Captain.”

It was the first time he had ever been proud of his father’s position; the first time he had ever thought about it. How wonderful to be talking intimately like this!

Her father was drowned at sea. She and her mother were left penniless, here in Stormouth. They started to take in lodgers — first a good class, and then, not getting them, a poor class; and then, still struggling, and her mother ailing, any class that chance would bring. So this man came, Mr. Wilks, of whom always she had been terrified, with whom ultimately, he desiring her, she was forced into marriage. Her mother was failing, her mother needed comforts; at last, if her life was to be saved, needed better conditions altogether, and there was scarcely enough to keep the roof over their heads. Then the man Wilks offered her marriage, promises for her mother’s well-being, everything that they most desperately needed. She was terrified. To offend him was to risk losing their sole means of support; but she could not bring herself to accede. She refused him. Her mother worsened, and, knowing only cunning kindness from the man, began to implore her consent. But she could not. She simply could not.

Pitiably she presented to Mr. Bywash her life at that period; attending on her mother, attending on the man; besought by her mother, and watching her dying before her eyes; baited by the man and frightened of him.

O pitiable! Mr. Bywash had not the remotest idea such things went on in life. Without interests and without solitudes in his own existence, he had never even troubled to imagine how other people existed. That this kind of thing should be! That she should suffer it!

Ultimately she gave way; she married Wilks.

Her mother, betrayed in every promise, died within the year. That was five years ago. That was all. She twice, as she had said, had tried to run away. He kept her without money. She had stolen from him that with which she had made the attempt whose lamentable termination Mr. Bywash had seen. She never would have the chance again. Where could she go, how could she live, if ever she had again the chance? And one day he would kill her. She knew he would. Escape—she must escape. Where? How?

She wrung her hands, piteously regarding Mr. Bywash. That was all.

Escape? Where? How? Terrible and enormous enterprises began to shake the mind of Mr. Bywash.

VI

But, O, the new, amazing life amid which these terrible and enormous enterprises began to form; the

revelations, the ecstasies, out of which, as high sparks springing out of flame, they sprung!

All he had never been, all he had never known, stirred, moved, breathed, warmed, awoke, and came to life within him. As wine through exhausted senses, as rain among the baked and arid water-courses of the plains, as dew by night upon the desert, as springtide in hibernating homes of creature and of insect, as all of these, so, within Mr. Bywash, saps that had never flowed, pulses that had never beat, ardours that had never kindled, emotions whose suns had never dawned, perceptions whose eyes had opened never.

He loved! The spirit breathed upon the waters of his being, and that which had been void and purposeless took form and movement. He loved! The world, which had contained for him nobody and nothing, contained a glorious and wondrous other, and through her teemed, hymned, and radiated with glories and with wonders. He had never opened his heart to himself, much less to another. He opened it to her, and the flood of its outpouring was beyond words delicious to him. He told her all his life as she had told him hers. He told her of his father and his mother, of Harry and of Tom. Oh, wonderful to have some one to whom to tell such things! Oh, wonderful in such things to find a pride and warming of the heart. And oh, when he was absent from her, what dreams, what visions, what revelations of new worlds! He never had read anything except desultorily the newspaper. He began now to be voracious of reading tales of love. Cheap, trashy stuff, their hectic covers and their burning titles were

his only guide to them. The love they told was all he sought in them, skipping all else that they contained. How the hero loved and how the heroine loved; how their love came to them; how they felt their love and how they declared their love — that was all he wanted. Avid to be schooled in love, and their transports to compare with his, his surgings to express in terms of theirs, hungrily from these cheap and crudely written prints he tore love as from a bone a starving animal tears meat. He took out pages and carried them with him; transcribed passages and got them by heart.

One day she told him her name was Enid.

Enid!

There were three outstanding things that happened in his reading. They came from sources incomparably above the stuff whereon he feasted, and in the case of two, but that they came upon him detached and removed from their surrounding confusions, would have been beyond his taste.

One was the lines printed beneath a water-colour painting of a bowl of violets hanging in a print-seller's window:

“ violets dim,
But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath. . . ”

It smote him like a catch at his throat. Once when she was talking to him she had closed her eyes, and he had trembled to see the exquisite delicacy of her lids. White; and yet not white for having the faintest, softest tinge of blue. He had gazed as a pilgrim might

gaze upon a shrine. He had never imagined such a hue could be. Lo, here was the very expression of it; the inexpressible expressed exactly; the vision so ethereal that he never could precisely recall it, here precisely recalled. "Violets dim . . ." Yes! Yes! And sweeter — "Sweeter than . . . Cytherea's breath." That meant if you stooped to touch with your lips a bed of violets. Yes! Yes! Exactly that if one might stoop to kiss those lids of hers! Wonderful! Wonderful! That was what he wanted — words to express these astounding things, these exquisite and wondrous things.

The second occasion touched a profounder depth and led directly to the third. This was before the second-hand bookseller's from whose tray of cheap moderns and periodicals he distilled his love potions. Within the window were displayed volumes of the poets; opened, their leaves bound back with bands. Searching amid his sensational covers, his eye glanced up to the books and negligently took a verse:

"I held it truth with him who sings
To one clear harp in divers tones."

Meaningless! But his eye, on the point of returning to his quest, was held, and completed the stanza:

"That men may rise on stepping-stones
Of their dead selves to higher things."

Ah! He caught his breath with the sound as it were of a sob.

On stepping-stones — may rise on stepping-stones
. . . of their dead selves . . . to higher things. . . .

Might they? *Could* they? Might he? Could he? Could he get himself like Tom — like Harry? Could he rise to their courage, to their bold, manly qualities? Was it possible that on stepping-stones of those shocking infirmities of spirit of which he now was so poignantly aware he could rise to—to courage? Not shrink? Not tremble? Not shudder every time there came across his mind the image of that violent and frightful man? Not know that in a crisis, that if a crisis ever came between that man and her and him, not know that in such a crisis inevitably he would desert her? Was it possible?

He turned from the bookshop, new matter from that which had taken him there in his mind, and the wind toppled the upmost of a pile of battered second-hand rag-bag stuff. He stooped to replace it, and his thumb was upon the concluding words of the volume:

“ . . . So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

He looked at the title. *Pilgrim's Progress*. He read again, two lines higher:

“ . . . to the river side, into which as he went he said, ‘Death where is thy sting?’ And as he went down deeper he said, ‘Grave where is thy victory?’ So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.”

Courage! Courage! O matchless courage here!

He bought the book — tuppence! — and hurried with it to his lodging.

VII

He was back at Tidborough.

He was planning her escape.

He had for some time known a little empty cottage on the outskirts of the village of Penny Green, a few miles from Tidborough. He sold a portion of the investment left him by his father and bought the cottage; and now the rapturous delights of searching shops to furnish and adorn it — for her!

Before he left her, on the termination of his holiday, he told her of the cottage and of the escape it offered her. He pretended the cottage was already his; “on his hands,” as he put it, and would be all the better for a tenant. How was she to live? That was simple. There was an immense demand for furnished rooms in and around Penny Green; it had always been, he said, an idea of his to put into this cottage some one who could let off the two spare rooms there would be; it was really a piece of luck for him to find her for the purpose.

That was how he put it. That the demand for rooms in Penny Green was much greater than the supply was true; he knew it well in the course of his duties at the estate office. The inventions of his story — the cottage “on his hands,” the service she would do him by occupying it — were for the purpose of maintaining the part on which, quite well he knew, alone rested her acceptance of his comradeship; the prisoner’s mouse, the strange but welcome visitant of her incarceration. No more than that; and as, in their meetings, he had

never dared to hint at his love, so now, in his plan for her escape, he sedulously presented no more than kindness. To hint at more risked giving her alarm, severance of their friendship, refusal of his aid. And threatened worse than that. He knew she never had remotely imagined feelings of love for him; but he felt it surely would kill him to hear it, in actual fact, from her lips. He was as one knowingly carrying within him sentence of death in form of mortal sickness but terrified to present himself to the physician and hear his doom. Therefore his acceptance of his part, therefore his inventions, therefore his reiteration to her only of this most true portion of his case—that never in his life till now had he had any one to talk to; that talking to her, telling her all about himself, was the most exquisite happiness he ever had imagined, and that he begged her, in charity, to accept this means of escape so that he still might come over to her in his leisure hours and sit — and just talk.

In his daydreams he dreamt to himself that one day, one day . . .

One day. . . . He was arranging her escape. He was planning also the winning of her love, to which gratitude for her escape should be the first step. She never could love him as he was, of that he was assured. The task was to remake himself . . . on stepping-stones . . . of his dead self . . . to become a man . . . not to shrink . . . not to tremble . . . not to be one useless mass of fears . . . to be a man . . . like Tom . . . like Harry . . . like other men . . . courage . . . courage!

The battered *Pilgrim's Progress*, more battered for his ceaseless use of it, was now his daily sustenance. As he had torn love from his periodicals, so now voraciously he sought to tear courage from the leaves of Bunyan's story. The allegorical significance was no more to him than, in search of love, had been the plots of the novels. It had been solely the emotions and the expressions of love his heart desired; it now was solely the emotions and expressions of courage for which his spirit craved. He read the book again and again; and every snatch of reading he terminated with the enormous elixir of that concluding line:

"So he passed over, and all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side."

That tingled him. That set his foot upon those dead-self stepping-stones and raised him up. He used to imagine himself doing some mighty and splendid thing, and all the trumpets sounding for him as he went proudly toward her, proudly, lovingly awaiting him. That was the thing! That was it! One day . . . One day. . . .

All was ready. He was walking to the cottage for a last indulgence in the sight of all the beauty and the comforts he had prepared for her. To-morrow was the day fixed. Everything was planned, and she had written confirming the plans. In case, after her flight, inquiries should be made at the station, she was to take the morning express train to London. That would throw her husband off the scent. From London a train would get her to Tidborough at three o'clock. He

would not meet her at the station. He was to have the ecstasy ("the pleasure" as he had temperately expressed it in writing to her) of welcoming her in the cottage, "which I think you will find" — another careful expression of the mere friendliness that was his — "which I think you will find more or less ready for you."

More or less! The quaint old cottage, beautiful in itself, lent its interior to beauty in its decoration. Love gave him taste. There was not an article he had purchased, nor one he had placed in position, but her face had been imagined against it, directing his perceptions as the North Star the wanderer. A neighbouring cottager, Mrs. Jennings, had been brought in daily to assist the arranging. Stepping in with him on his arrival on this last evening, she gave the admiration that was enchantment to him to hear.

"Well, if it isn't a picture!" declared Mrs. Jennings, gazing round the parlour. "A picture. I never would have believed to see the like of it outside of a real picture; I declare to goodness I wouldn't, and that's the truth, sir."

How pleased he was! He patted the head of tiny Laura, Mrs. Jennings's little girl, and with his other hand felt in his pocket for Laura's present that was to celebrate this splendid conclusion.

"Yes, it certainly does look nice, Mrs. Jennings. And, Mrs. Jennings, you're going to let Laura be over here to-morrow to be playing here when the lady arrives?"

Mrs. Jennings certainly was. She would just pop

Laura inside on her way to work after lunch, and there she'd be, all nice and pretty for the lady.

"And playing with her musical box," smiled Mr. Bywash, producing the present from his pocket.

How tiny Laura jumped and clapped her hands for joy! She had been promised anything she liked from the toyshops at Tidborough, and a musical box had been her choice. Mr. Bywash, in so far as he had ever noticed them at all, had always detested children. The new emotions that now were his had welcomed tiny Laura. He loved to see her playing about the floor. Enid would want a companion; she would love to have tiny Laura with her. He used to sit and imagine Enid with the child on her knee, telling her stories; Enid making tea, with the child clutching at her skirts. It made him feel — indescribable; it made his heart swell.

Mrs. Jennings ran off to her cottage. He sat himself down in the chair specially chosen for Enid's comfort. Tiny Laura at his feet fumbled the musical box out of its wrappings.

To-morrow! This time to-morrow Enid would be here. She would have examined the beauties of the cottage. She would be making tea for him. She would be enchanted. She would be beyond expression happy. In her heart would be the beginnings of her gratitude. The beginnings . . . the beginnings. . . .

"Now you're right, Laura. Turn the handle. Let's hear the pretty tunes."

He only knew of the toy that the girl in the shop had

called it a "three-tune" box. He smiled to see tiny Laura's tongue come out and move from side to side under the strain of her melody making. The tinkling tune was vaguely familiar; some popular air; he had probably heard it on street organs, perhaps in the park at Stormouth. He wondered if Enid could play the piano, and how much one would cost. Imagine sitting here of an evening while she played!

The musical box clicked. The music stopped.

"Go on, Laura. Wind on. Another one coming."

Yes, a piano. A piano would be fine if he could afford it. It could stand by the window there. How beautiful she would look seated at the keys. How she would love this room. To-morrow at this hour she would be here. How grateful she would be to him. How wonderful, indeed, that he had done all this. Planned her escape, purchased this home, furnished it. It had wanted some doing! It had! It was not a thing every one could have carried out so successfully. How he had developed in these last few weeks! He was twice, he was a dozen times the man he used to be. Stepping-stones . . . of those dead selves. He was climbing up. . . . He was . . . He was certain of it. . . .

"Go on, Laura. Wind away. Still another. Here, let me do this one." He stooped forward and took the box. Yes, climbing up. . . . Would never look back now. . . . He wound the handle —

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and ——"

“Take it, Laura. Take it away. You’d better go home now. You’re to go home now. Don’t you hear? No; don’t play it. You’re not to wind it. Time to go now. Don’t you *hear*?”

Laura was frightened.

* * * * *

The day was Thursday; early-closing day at Tidborough and chosen for that reason. He left the office at one o’clock. He had bought a “best suit” since this new thing had come into his life, and he went first to his lodgings to spruce himself up in it before going on to the cottage to await her. His spirits were high. The night had been bad. He had scarcely slept. That tune, that hateful tune, coming like that, had upset him. Through the night it had washed about the foundations of his new beliefs in himself as rising waters about timbers built in sand. Had he changed? Had he improved? If there came to his courage a test. . . . Was it an omen, that accursed tune, coming like that, in that place, at that hour, made by his own hands?

A feverish and tortured night.

But with the morning his oppression had gone. After all, at the worst, if indeed he was no more than the man he had been, even then, what test of his courage could possibly be? When she was safely arrived here she would be as secure here, and he would be as secure here, as if they were on another continent. It became easy as the morning advanced to build up from this certitude of safety assurance of courage if there were danger.

It always is.

He was working briskly upon it as he let himself into his lodgings and passed up the stairs to his room. Everything was safe. Everything was easy. Everything was wonderful and glorious. He was miles removed from the timid thing he had been. He could wish there might be some test of his manhood that Enid could see. If the horse that would be drawing her cab were to run away and he rush out from the cottage and stop it! If a bull were to frighten her in the lane outside and he most audaciously attack the brute and rescue her! Something like that! Ah, if there could be something like that!

But it was not anything like that. It was something quite different.

As he opened the door of his room and stepped within, the huge and malevolent form of her husband rose to greet him.

"Shut that door," said Mr. Wilks.

He turned and shut it.

One of those huge fists of Mr. Wilks presented a revolver in his face. The other fist shot into his chest, staggering him backwards and there clutched him, gathering up waistcoat and shirt in its enormous paw, and shook him ferociously so that his teeth knocked together. "Where's my wife?"

His tongue, in his sheer terror, clove to the roof of his mouth. He could not speak.

"Where is she? Out with it!"

"Not here."

Again that frightful shaking, jerking his head to

and fro. "Not here! I can see that with my own eyes, can't I? Is she in this house?"

"No."

"Coming here?"

"No."

He was shaken as if the breath were to be shaken from his body. "Listen to me. I know you've got her away." He called her by a gross epithet. "The — left half your letters behind. I know you've got her." Mr. Wilks returned the revolver to his pocket and put up the fist that had held it, clenched, terrific. "Am I going to start this on your face, or are you going to tell me? Quick with it!"

"I'll tell you."

"Quick with it."

He told.

Mr. Wilks flung him away. He staggered along the wall, crashed into the washing stand and fell over it to the floor. The ewer capsized. The water drenched him.

"Get up!" commanded Mr. Wilks. "You louse! Run away with a man's wife! *You!* Get up and show the way, and me lady'll see what I'm going to do with you, and you'll see what I'm going to do with me lady. Up with you!"

VIII

They were in the cottage, waiting for her. Mr. Wilks lolled in an armchair, a cigar in his mouth, his legs on the table. Hector Bywash sat opposite him,

the table between them, his head bowed in his hands. In the little room adjoining was tiny Laura. Mr. Wilks, engaged on arrival in ferocious mockery of the decorations of the pretty parlour, had not appeared to notice the child. Hector had got her out of view and shut the door upon her.

While they waited was heard the steady ticking of the clock upon the wall, bringing her closer; the heavy breathing of Mr. Wilks, inclined to doze; the occasional sharp intake of Hector's breath, in vision watching her approach to his betrayal of her; sometimes through the door the faint tinkle of the musical box.

Hector Bywash, head buried in his hands, was silently rocking in agony of this culmination to which he had brought his life, his new-found dreams, his new-raised hopes in himself.

All his life's uselessness and turpitude had culminated in this unspeakable betrayal of the woman he worshipped. "Where's my wife?" and, vilest thing that he was, immediately he had betrayed her. His mind ran up and down his life that had brought him to this final perfidy; he groaned aloud.

"Shut that," commanded Mr. Wilks drowsily, and he was silent.

His mind, as one that runs distractedly to and fro, wringing his hands before his house in flames, ran up and down his every scene with her, his every thought of her; and from each scene and thought came back to this betrayal of her, this trap to which now, in a few minutes, she came. His mind stood among the ecstasies of love he had torn from his books; it cried

with a most terrible bitterness before the heights of courage which fondly he believed he had absorbed from his *Pilgrim's Progress*. And always back to his betrayal of her.

And suddenly there penetrated the agony of his mind this most frightful thought, "*There is still time to save her!*"

Some men successfully flee judgment all their lives; wriggle from truth, stifle truth, somehow get away and escape truth. Mr. Bywash all his life had thus escaped. He now was run to earth. He was caught. Truth had him.

This happened then to Mr. Bywash. There came to him, as comes to men thus captured, trial within his own bosom of the kind that is said to await all men in the last senate of eternity; as then before God, so here within their hearts, truth's prisoners protest their case before the verities seated in judgment about them.

Mr. Bywash, laid by the heels after a very long run of freedom, stood now in such a court; a very tiny figure, prisoner at the bar of truth, a very pitiable object for the assemblage of so tremendous a tribunal, and looked from the records of his life hung upon the walls to the faces of the verities sitting as arbiters upon his case, and wrung his hands, and thus protested.

THE DEFENDANT: My Lords, my Lords, it's all very well. My Lords, you see, my Lords, you must surely see, it was like this. If only I had had a minute's preparation; if only, as I went up those stairs, I had known he was waiting in my room; if only I had even

heard him when I was just the other side of the door ; if only I had had the smallest, faintest warning I would have had time to think, I would have had time to steel myself, and I wouldn't have done it. I wouldn't. Indeed and indeed, my Lords, I would not have done it.

THE ARBITERS: Attend. You have time now. Time to think, time to steel yourself, time to prevent it. You have betrayed her, but she has not yet come to your betrayal. She is on the road. But there are — look at the clock — twenty minutes before she can get here. Twenty minutes between you and what you will be for ever after. Twenty minutes not to do it, and you have not done it yet. Twenty minutes to save her.

The court adjourned and the Defendant with shaking limbs crept out of the court.

Mr. Bywash very cautiously raised his bowed head to the level of the table. The huge soles of Mr. Wilks's boots confronted him. He raised his glance above them. Mr. Wilks's eyes were half closed ; no glow was to be seen upon the cigar that depended from his mouth.

Mr. Bywash's mind fixed upon the revolver that had been pointed at him. He knew which pocket it was in. If he could get that. . . . The light table was so small that its further end was beneath Mr. Wilks's thighs, and Mr. Wilks's chair was tilted back. If he gave one great heave from beneath the table . . . and then a dash and a grab for the revolver while the man was sprawling . . . if he did that . . . if he could . . . if he dared. . . .

Ten minutes passed. He went back into the court, and the court re-assembled to hear him.

THE DEFENDANT: My Lords, my Lords, it's like this. You see, if I *did* attack him, what could I possibly *do*? I'm ready to try. I'm perfectly ready to do it. I swear I am. But what earthly good could I do? Any one looking at me and looking at him would say it would be grotesque and useless folly. In two minutes I should be killed. My Lords, my Lords, isn't that the fact? Isn't that *true*? What earthly good? In two minutes I should be killed.

THE ARBITERS: Be killed, then.

The Defendant covered his face with his hands and bowed, as beneath an insupportable weight, to the ground.

THE ARBITERS (unmoved): Be killed, then.

From the Defendant, prone upon the ground, no word.

THE ARBITERS: Be killed, then. That will save her.

THE DEFENDANT (screaming): How? How? How can it save her?

THE ARBITERS: Attend. You have never faced the truth in your life. You are facing it now. You have always argued yourself out of every danger. You now cannot argue yourself out. Be killed. It will save her. If you are killed, he will have murdered you. He will flee for his life. He will never dare to come near her again. She will be free of him for ever. You have five minutes, Bywash.

The court withdrew, and left Mr. Bywash.

IX

Be killed, then . . .

He thought "On stepping-stones . . . of their dead selves. . . . One quick moment and it will all be over. . . . At once. . . . If I don't do it at once. . . ."

He put his hands beneath the table. He sprang upright and hurled the table up and back. He flung himself upon the sprawling, cursing body, and dived, and thrust his hand and the revolver was in his hand. He was clutched and overthrown. They were somehow upon their feet. The revolver was in his right hand. The left hand of Mr. Wilks was upon it. The other hand was at his throat, throttling him.

This is what happened.

The revolver was muzzle upwards in their united grasp between them. They held it elbow to elbow, forearm to forearm, wrist to wrist, knuckle to knuckle. It was poised between them and, like the dial of a pressure gauge, moved now to this side, now to that, now tensely quivered at the apex of its movement. Sometimes it went a little nearer Mr. Wilks's chin, sometimes a little nearer the chin of Mr. Bywash, sometimes trembled almost at rest midway between them.

Mr. Bywash's face was black with the pressure of Mr. Wilks's fingers upon his throat. But while the eyes of Mr. Wilks bulged with fear and savagery, as he strove for possession of the weapon, the eyes of Mr. Bywash shone with an intense and an extraordinary light. The deep waters of death were about him, and he knew himself descending into death; but he might

have said, "Death, where is thy sting?" And he felt his strength going, and knew the end was upon him; but he might have said, "Grave, where is thy victory?"

An enormous exaltation of mind was his. There was a great roaring in his ears, but it was to him as the clamour of many voices acclaiming him. He relaxed his arm, and the revolver came with a thud to his neck and was discharged.

He collapsed at the knees in the arms of Mr. Wilks. He collapsed at the waist and fell away in the arms of Mr. Wilks, his head hanging.

Mr. Wilks stared with starting eyes upon his face. Mr. Wilks said terribly, "My God!"

He dropped the body of Hector Bywash, and stood away and stared in terror. He turned and rushed from the house. A cab was drawing up at the door. The driver shouted. Mr. Wilks put up his hands to hide his face, and turned and fled.

She came in and she ran to him and knelt beside him and put her arms about him and she heard very faintly, "Beloved!"

A small sigh passed then from the lips of Mr. Bywash, and there tinkled from the adjoining room:

"Some talk of Alexander, and some of Hercules;
Of HECTOR and Lysander——"

So, to that threnody, he passed over; and it was perhaps, as he had wished, that all the trumpets sounded for him on the other side.

THE ROUGH LITTLE GIRL AND THE
SMOOTH LITTLE GIRL

THE ROUGH LITTLE GIRL AND THE SMOOTH LITTLE GIRL

Anything rougher for her years (twelve) than the rough little girl has probably never been known. "Oh, darling," her mother used to sigh and say to her, "Oh, darling, you *are* rough": to which the rough little girl used responsively to sigh and "Oh, Cherishable" would reply (she always called her mother Cherishable, being much devoted to her). "Oh, Cherishable, I *know* I am"; and would sigh again, being ever so distressed at distressing her most dear mother, but also knowing herself to be hopelessly the slave of the quick, impetuous, imperious spirit that was hers. She *was* rough.

And anything gentler, that is to say smoother, for *her* years (eleven) than the smooth little girl is equally impossible to believe. "Swipes, Lily," her father used to say to her (Swipes being a coarse expression he often used, and Lily the name of the little girl who was smooth), "Swipes, Lily, one'd think you were a pauper's child the way you creep about. You aren't half quiet, Lily." To which "Oh, Father," the smooth little girl would reply, "Oh, Father, it *is* hard to be noisy when you're not." She *was* smooth.

So there they were, the two of them, rough and smooth; and the very odd, strange circumstance about them is that each occupied the position in life which,

if half we are told were true, should have been occupied by the other. A rough little girl may be expected to have rough parents, a vulgar home and rude antecedents: a smooth little girl almost certainly will have gentle parents, elevating surroundings and antecedents cultured and refined. The contrary is here the case. The rough little girl had every social and domestic advantage; the smooth little girl had none. The origins of the family of the rough little girl were rooted back beyond 1066, when the first Chilperine (her name) came over with William the Conqueror and fought beside him at the Battle of Hastings: the origins of the smooth little girl were darkly and impenetrably obscure prior to forty years ago, when the first Pook (her father) was employed in washing the dishes in a hot-sausage shop in the Mile End Road.

This must be presented in greater detail.

Anything more swagger, blue-blooded, aristocratic, and altogether superior and splendid than the family of the rough little girl it is impossible in all the Peerage of the United Kingdom to discover. True, there was no peerage, or title of any sort, in the family of Chilperine: that there was not was part of their pride. Over and over again, as generation succeeded generation, they could have been ennobled; but over and over again, as Chilperine on Chilperine added lustre to his line, they refused to be ennobled. "I am a Chilperine," they used to say: and when they said that (or thought it) there was no more to be said. It was their motto. "*Sui il Chiefs Pelrins.*" Which is, being interpreted out of the old Norman-French in which it was said after Hast-

ings by the first Chilperine to his sovereign, "I am the Pilgrim Knight." Time has corrupted Chiefs Pelrins into Chilperine, and usage has turned the family saying into "I am a Chilperine"; but "I am the Pilgrim Knight" was the translation always kept to by the rough little girl, and the whole legend shows you, anyway, how splendid and superior the Chilperines were.

A visit to the castle would show you more. Chilperine, for its treasury of art, as Chilperine itself as monument of beauty and romance, is the show place of show places of England. Of every aspect books might be (and have been) written. Let us here, and have done with it, make a note on but one — that Great Gallery of Chilperine wherein are ranged the Chilperine portraits. There in the Great Gallery they stand, those mighty Chilperines, and there among them often had stood the rough little girl, regarding them (rough as she was and little as she was) with that same pride, at once lofty and tolerant, at once conscious and unassuming, that is, as they say, "the Chilperine look."

Now turn to the smooth little girl.

A sharper turn cannot possibly be imagined. *Her* father was called — Pook! *His* origin was — a hot-sausage shop! *His* motto was — Pork! It really is too vulgar. One cannot, after the air of Chilperine Castle, bear it. We must skip the years (as Mr. Pook porked through them) and come to him at the time he entered the story here presented. He was still porcine. He was still vulgar. But he was at least clean and he was rich — oh, rich, rich, rich! Rolling in

riches! He was a millionaire. They said he was a multi-millionaire.

How could he be so rich? How could a man who started in life washing dishes in a hot-sausage shop become a ——

The answer hit in the eye wherever such questioner chanced to turn his eye. Was the questioner travelling in the train? Let him glance from the window. What did he see? He saw at every mile, he saw on every hilltop, marring the countryside, in letters twelve feet high,

POOK'S PORKY PUFFS

Was he walking the business streets of our cities? Let him but lift his eyes. What sign was that above that marble-fronted restaurant?

POOK'S PORK PALACE

The rise of Mr. Pook from hot sausages to six-cylindere motor cars, from poverty to enormous wealth, is explained. Genius did it. Contrast the term Porky Puff with the term Pork Pie: the dainty suggestiveness of the one with the sinister deadliness (to many) of the other. That was Genius. Compare — but you could not compare — the flavour of the two. That was Genius. The flavour was not pork — it was porky. Pork may have been the basis of it: the flavour that came to the palate was a delicious something reminiscent of cold turkey, of cold pheasant, of cold venison; and, when the porky puff was served piping hot,

of turkey, of pheasant and of venison tender as a piece of butter and cooked to a turn. By genius, Mr. Pook produced for this exquisite morsel a casket (the puff) flaky, creamy, melty, as the commonplace pork pie is ironclad, stubborn and unyielding. By genius he sold it, singly, in pairs, threes, half-dozens, or dozens, in cartons so dainty to the eye, so handy for the pocket or the hamper that, as was said a thousand times a day, it seemed a shame to open them. By flash on flash of genius, new wonders devised he out of his initial wonder: Princess Porky Puffs for the luncheon tables of the élite; Party Porky Puffs for the light-refreshment tables of social gatherings of every degree; Picnic Porky Puffs for the tourist and traveller; finally Pioneer Porky Puffs, packed in air-tight tins and bearing his written guarantee to keep sweet and fresh for ever, to go forth to give new life and sustenance to those facing hardship and privation in the wild places of the earth.

I am writing for gentle readers and I therefore have pleasure in adding that, as might be expected, and as has already been hinted, Mr. Pook, self-made millionaire, was vulgar and blatant; and that his ostentatious wealth and his horrible advertising monstrosities caused his name (but not his porky puffs) to be held in reprobation by all nice people. Mr. Pook felt this. Constantly sneered at in smart papers, he felt very severely these attacks on his personality, and the persistent and not veiled cold-shouldering with which were greeted his efforts to get into society. A widower, he had but one child, the smooth little girl, upon whom he most pas-

sionately doted, for whom with a really pathetic intensity he longed for social place and recognition, and largely on whose account he did the terrific thing that causes this story to be written. The Chilperines, impoverished by death duties and by taxation, were forced to sell Chilperine — and Mr. Pook bought it!

Within the space of four years there fell in the Great War the father of the rough little girl and his only son and heir. There were left but the mother of the rough little girl and the rough little girl herself, and the day came when the trustees of the estate, assembled in the Castle, told Mrs. Chilperine that ownership no longer could be maintained.

When I tell you that the mother of the rough little girl, when the trustees looked at her across the table for her assent, could not speak, but just drooped back in her chair and drew from her bosom the Chilperine rose she wore there and suffered it to fall to the floor; and when I tell you that the rough little girl, rough as she was, cried out in a very strange voice, "Leave Chilperine! Oh, Cherishable, we can't, we can't!" you will realise what was this disaster to those called upon to bear it. When I tell you of the shocked amaze with which, in leading articles, the news of the impending sale of Chilperine was commented upon by the Press, of the Letters To the Editor ("whose every stone, sir, is a page of England's story"), of the campaign (nugatory) to cause Chilperine to be purchased for the nation ("this final crime in the record of the government's crushing policy of waste and spoliation"), you will realise the howl that went up to high heaven when it

was made known that the purchaser of Chilperine, the new occupant of the Castle, the new owner of its treasures, was — Pook!

You can imagine, at the howl, the feelings of Mr. Pook; you can imagine, at their departure, the feelings of the rough little girl and of her mother. Dry-eyed, as Chilperines must, but with their hands terribly each in each, mother and daughter had received the news of the death of the father of the rough little girl; “May I cry,” said the rough little girl with a shake in her voice, “upstairs?” and when her mother, with her teeth on her lip and a speck of blood there, nodded, away like a flash sped the rough little girl and like a flash up halls and corridors and stairs (four good minutes, so vast the castle is, it took her), but never burst in all that time, but terribly did when soon her mother came to her and found her face down on her bed. “My Daddy! My Daddy!” sobbed the rough little girl. “My darling, he was a Chilperine,” her mother said, “and he would have us remember, oh Brenda, Brenda, that you and I ——” But “My Daddy, my Daddy!” was all the rough little girl could bring to that.

Dry-eyed, out of their hand-clasp terrible indeed, so that the weals were on the fingers of the rough little girl an hour after, they had stood as they came out of church one Sunday and looked from face to face of all the whispering, glancing knots that stood about the door. “What is it, Jason?” the mother of the rough little girl had said to one. “Lady,” said old Jason, “God comfort ’ee, ’tis Master Hugo gone.” Very straight stood the mother of the rough little girl and looked

upon the faces that sadly looked at her. "He was a Chilperine," she said. Very heavey was the rough little girl seen by the beholders to be, heavey in the chest and heavey at the throat, as though something swelled and pressed for exit within her, but very straight with her mother she walked down between the heads all bared and bowed, and all she ever said to be heard was said to Martin the footman, who had not got open the door of the car when they arrived at the gate.

"Quick! Quick!" said the rough little girl.

So, because they were Chilperines, on neither of those two terrible occasions was either of them seen by any one to cry; but when came that terrific day on which, hand in hand, they came down the steps for the last time, then were seen tears in Chilperine eyes, and, by some (it is told to this day in the Chilperine Arms) was seen other emotion and another emblem of emotion such as never before in all the long generations of the Chilperines mortal eye had beheld.

This emblem of emotion was the long, bright red tongue of the rough little girl.

By misfortune, or by characteristic gaucherie of the manufacturer of Porky Puffs, the car of Mr. Pook, arriving, passed at the lodge gates the car of the Chilperines departing. Gloom was in the Porky Puff car. Mr. Pook, driving through the village, had seen in the scowls and in the deliberately turned backs of the villagers the manner of social relations that were likely to be his, and his soul was bitter within him. Tears were in the Chilperine car. The rough little girl had been since daybreak through the agonies of farewell,

and through the agonies yet more sharp of imagining the vile Pook amongst her treasures and her darling playthings of stable and of garden, and her heart was broken and savage within her. The cars met. They had to slow to pass. The rough little girl saw the smooth little girl and the coarse and abominable father of the smooth little girl. She levelled a baleful eye upon the father of the smooth little girl. She pulled at him a face truly diabolical in its contempt and malignity, and out of this face she projected at him as far as it would go what appeared to be quite seven inches of bright red tongue.

She *was* rough.

Quickness of decision and ruthlessness of nice feeling had very largely contributed to make Mr. Pook the financial colossus that he had become. They helped him now. Entirely unprepared for this horrible outrage that suddenly confronted him, he, nevertheless, and despite he was fifty-eight years of age, immediately countered it. At the bright red Chilperine tongue he thrust out, as far as he could thrust it, a dull, blueish Pook tongue.

Thus, tongues at full extension, met for the first time, and passed, Chilperine and Pook.

Aghast at conduct in her daughter so unspeakably gross (rough though she knew her to be) the mother of the rough little girl at last found words. "*Darling!* In all my life I never could have imagined ——"

"Cherishable, I *had* to," said the rough little girl.

"Your roughness, daring ——"

"Cherishable, I simply *had* to."

"Rougher and rougher you seem to get. Darling, it really pains me."

"He did it too."

"You are a Chilperine."

"But I did it first."

"More utter, utter shame to you."

"All the same I'm glad I was first," said the rough little girl, and added "Toads!"

Her mother sighed.

The rough little girl at that, as was her habit, snuggled against her mother and said, "Oh, Cherishable, I *know* I am rough. Still—" and beneath her breath muttered again "Toads!"

The story now leaps on about two months, and finds the rough little girl back at the school whereat she was a boarder and wherein she was the roughest little girl that so swagger and exclusive a school had ever known. Her intolerant and her impetuous spirit caused her to be a bully and a hectorer of all of her own years, and by all except her chosen intimates she was indeed much disliked. She had a sharp tongue and a rough hand, and they were afraid of her. Nevertheless (or should it be therefore?) she occupied a very prominent position in the school; on the splendid occasions when parents visited the school for celebrative functions there was no companion one and all were more eager to introduce to their parents, and, because she was who she was, no child whom the mothers were more interested to meet, than "the little Chilperine girl."

Well, the story, rushing on, finds the little Chilperine girl engaged, not in hectoring her companions or in

meeting their mothers, but in writing, in highest heat, to her own mother :

“ Cherishable, what do you think? The most extrordinry and atrochus thing has happened. At half-term, which is the day after to-morrow, who ever do you think is coming to this school? The Pook girl!!! The little girl of that lothsome Pook creature who turned us out of darling, beloved Chilperine!!! Oh, Cherishable, can you imagine it? That frightful sick-faced child we saw in that ghastly yellow car that day when I put out my tongue at her, not content with lording it over every inch of my angel Chilperine, is coming to pursue me here in my very school, the retch and tode!! Well, Cherishable, you can depend on me to have my revenge on her and make her life a burdon to her. I’ve told all the girls who she is and of course they all know, as everybody knows, what that horrible Pook, her father, has done to us. You know, don’t you, that not one of the families around dear Chilperine will have anything to do with him and I daresay he’s sent his sickfaced child to school to get her out of what he must be feeling. Well, he’ll jolly soon find out what he’s done for her. I’ll make her life a burdon to her as sure as her name’s the hideous and repulsive name it is — Pook. The day after to-morrow! I only wish it was to-morrow. We’re all ready for her — especially *me!* ”

That was the letter the rough little girl wrote and this was the reply the rough little girl received. It was a telegram. It went flying back to her the very minute her mother read her letter, and for a woman who had set herself to practise rigid economy, it must have been one of the most extravagant telegrams ever

written. Mrs. Chilperine, in order that her daughter should make no mistake about it, even paid to have it punctuated :

“ Oh, darling, whatever can you be thinking of to speak of taking your revenge? You are a Chilperine. No Chilperine ever takes revenge. Just think of that poor, frightened little mite coming amongst all you girls and you planning to make her poor little life a burden to her! Darling, you are a Chilperine, and you must make her life a joy to her, poor little thing. Now listen, darling. You are to be her friend and protector and to cherish her in every way. I am wiring Miss Philpotts to let the poor thing share your room, which I am sure can be arranged, as Nora Blossom has had to go home and you have your room alone. So do this, darling, because you are a Chilperine and Chilperines must; and never, never have thoughts like that again. Heaps of kisses, darling.”

II

“ You are Lily Pook,” said the rough little girl to the smooth little girl. “ I am Brenda Chilperine and I am going to be kind to you and cherish you. Don’t speak. This is my room and you are going to share it and we shall call it our room and you can use everything in it that is mine except my dagger paperknife with the gold handle because it is the last thing I took out of Chilperine. Oh, well. I suppose you must. Yes, you can use that too. Don’t speak. If any girl here ever teases you, or if you are ever unhappy, you are to tell me at once, and I will make it all right for you

because I am going to make your life a joy to you. Don't speak. You may call me Brenda, and you may show me all your letters and I will show you all mine. There's just one thing I am not going to do and will not do. I will not and shall not call you Lily. There's a barrier between us because you have turned me out of my beloved Chilperine and gone to live there yourself. No living soul in this school will know or suspect that there is a barrier between us because I'm going to cherish you till I'm black in the face. But you know and I know it, and what I'm going to call you is a private sign between us and a memorial unto us that there is a barrier. I'm not going to call you Lily; I'm going to call you Pook. Every time you hear me call you Pook, even if it's in the middle of doing an utmost kindness to you, you will remember the barrier. Don't speak. Every girl here will call you Pook because they will hear me calling you Pook. They won't know that it's a memorial between us but we shall know, and whenever a girl calls you Pook our eyes will meet and we shall know our private barrier. I say," said the rough little girl in a new voice, "that will be rather fun, won't it, to have our eyes meet like that just like they do in books? Sometimes I shall be perhaps right at the end of a long room and yet right across the room our eyes will meet and our souls commune. Eh?"

"How will you hear?" said the smooth little girl doubtfully.

"Stupid!" cried the rough little girl, "if I don't hear, it can't be done, can it? If you're going to ask nonsensical questions like that, it's going to be harder

than ever for me to cherish you. All the same " (and her voice changed again), " it might sometimes be hard to hear and other sometimes one of us might forget. What will have to be done is for the other one then to snap her fingers very loudly like that," and snap with her finger and thumb went the rough little girl with a crack like a whip (she had ~~bony~~ fingers through much hockey, lawn tennis and cricket). " Snap yours."

The snap made by the smooth little girl was not at all approved by the rough little girl (it could indeed only be written by the ridiculous sound "*pluff*"). "Your finger and thumb," said the rough little girl, "are simply podge"; and was told apologetically, "They're very hot and slippery"; and replied, "Wipe them then, you stupid old thing! I must say a more frightened looking child I've never seen. Are you always frightened like this?"

"I'm rather strange here, please," said the smooth little girl.

"Don't say 'please' like that," said the rough little girl. "Now come with me and I'll show you the other girls in my form, and we'll do this secret-sign business. Wipe your finger and thumb on your handkerchief."

At this hour the girls of the rough little girl's form were in their rooms (every girl at this most swagger and exclusive school sharing with another the sweetest little study-bedroom you ever saw) and at the first study was performed the performance repeated in all the other studies. "Hilda and Mary," said the rough little girl, entering the first, "this is my new and great

friend. I told you I was going to make her life a burden to her but I also told you afterwards I was not, but that I was going to cherish her. If you're not kindness itself to her, you'd better look out for yourself, that's all. Her name is Pook. Lily's her ordinary name, but Pook is what she's got to be called. Take her over to the far end and call her Pook."

Hilda and Mary, much obedient to the rough little girl, as were all the girls of her age, took the smooth little girl aside as bade, and looked at her silently and with embarrassment.

"Go on!" cried the rough little girl, "Pook her, can't you!"

"Pook," said Mary.

"Idiot!" cried the rough little girl. "Say something to her, can't you?"

"How do you do, Pook," said Hilda.

"Quite well, thank you," said the smooth little girl.

"My back is turned! My back is turned!" cried the rough little girl. "I can't hear what's going on. Signal, can't you?"

Pluff went the hot and damp fingers of the smooth little girl.

"*Tchk!*" very vexedly and impatiently went the tongue of the rough little girl. "Louder!"

Pluff.

"Much louder. Twice."

Pluff, pluff.

Very slowly and dramatically the rough little girl turned, folded her arms, and bending her head forward

above them directed upon the smooth little girl a gaze of truly terrifying intensity.

Recovering, "That's a sign of the deadly secret between us," she explained to the astonished Mary and Hilda. "Come now, Pook; and do for goodness' sake wipe those horrible fingers of yours."

That night when they were got to bed in the two little beds that stood side by side, "There's one question I should like to ask you," said the rough little girl. "Have you ever seen me before to-day?"

"Yes, I have," said the smooth little girl. "Why did you put your tongue out at us?"

"Because my tongue's my own and I can slide it in and out without asking *you*," said the rough little girl. "Your father put out his tongue at me, which was far worse, and I may as well tell you at once that a more hideous tongue I never saw. I suppose he lives on porky puffs. What I was going to say to you is: Have I made your life a joy to you to-day?"

"You have been very, very kind to me," most earnestly replied the smooth little girl. "I was dreading coming here but you have been kindness itself to me, Brenda."

"That's what I've *got* to be," returned the rough little girl, "because I am a Chilperine; and if it made you unhappy my sticking my tongue out at you, I hereby withdraw my tongue. Talking about porky puffs, have you by any chance brought any with you?"

"I've got one packet of six in my box."

"Princess porky puffs or Party porky puffs?"

"Party, Brenda."

"Well, it was very wrong of you," said the rough little girl very sternly. "It's utterly forbidden to bring grub to school and if you're found out to-morrow you will be in disgrace. I've got to shield you in every way and it seems to me that the only way to shield you in this is for us to eat them now before they're discovered. Get them, Pook."

The smooth little girl got them.

"Three for you and three for me," said the rough little girl, dividing the packet. "You may think," she added as they sat up in bed munching, "that I'm enjoying these. As a matter of fact, so much as to touch a porky puff is to me to eat of the bread of affliction." She munched the bread of affliction with capable jaws. "All the same, I frankly admit they're very good. If you don't want that last one of yours I'll have it for you. Now go to sleep and don't speak another word. This has been a very trying day for me and I can perfectly well see you are going to try me very much; even apart from the fact that I have a mortal grudge against you, which I have to quell because I am a Chilperine, I think you are in many ways the most stupid child I have ever met. Good night, Pook."

Thus was begun for the smooth little girl a tutelage at once stern and affectionate, harsh and devoted. Brenda unquestionably bullied Lily, but as unquestionably bullied her always for her own good. She never spoke to her a word that any one overhearing possibly could call a kind word; but all her sharp and apparently unfeeling admonitions were towards helping Lily to hold her own, and it was woe betide any girl other than

Brenda's self who dared make unhappy the daughter of Mr. Pook. The rough little girl cherished the smooth little girl, and the day came when Mr. Pook thanked her and was himself cherished.

III

"If you can't hold your own, I must make you hold your own," was the rough little girl's most constant cry; and there came a day when it was extended to include the father of the smooth little girl also. "If your father," said the rough little girl in her impatient way, "is coming down to Speech Day, he's coming down to Speech Day. And if I say he never will hold his own here, he never *will* hold his own here. Have you ever known me wrong in anything I've told you?"

"Never," said the smooth little girl.

"Very well, then. My mother can't come and even if she could come I should have to be lugging you about all day, for a more shy or stupid child I have never seen or imagined. I've got to cherish you and I suppose that means I've got to cherish your frightful father as well."

"Brenda," said the smooth little girl timidly, "he's not frightful."

"He's got a frightful tongue," said Brenda, "because I've seen it, as you perfectly well know."

The smooth little girl rather painfully coloured. "He was very upset that day because the people of the village had been rude to him. Every one at Chilperine still is

very rude to him, and he says he knows all the parents here at Speech Day will be rude to him."

"Not if I cherish him," said Brenda — "unless of course he puts out his tongue at them."

"He won't. My darling father wouldn't really be unkind to a soul. He says he will be equal with all these people one day. He says he'll be a lord before he's finished, Brenda."

The rough little girl gave a snort down her rough little nose. "Perhaps he says he'll be the man in the moon some day?"

"I've never heard him say so," said the smooth little girl.

"You know, the simple fact about you," said Brenda, "is that you're a born idiot."

"Yes, Brenda," said the smooth little girl.

Nevertheless it was not treatment such as is normally awarded to a born idiot that the smooth little girl had in her daily letters reported to her father. On the contrary, it was treatment that seemed to have filled her with an ecstatic devotion.

"You've been uncommon good to my little lass," said Mr. Pook on his arrival, "and I'm uncommon grateful to you; especially," added Mr. Pook, with a shade of embarrassment, "seeing as what passed between us the first time we met."

"Tongues," said the rough little girl.

"Something like that," said Mr. Pook.

"All it is," said the rough little girl, "is that I've had to cherish Pook because I am a Chilperine, and to-

day I have got to cherish you. I daresay you are feeling rather nervous, aren't you?"

"To tell you the honest truth," admitted Mr. Pook, "I am; though why," and his voice became slightly defiant, "I should be, I don't know."

The rough little girl looked him up and down appraisingly. "I should say it's those frightful boots you've got on," she reported.

Mr. Pook had arrived in a terrific car. He had been met by the little girls smooth and rough at a point where a path across the grounds of the swagger and exclusive school met the main road, and he had disclosed himself on alighting from the car wearing a striped blue suit that struck one as neat, but white buckskin boots that struck one as gaudy.

"What's the matter with the boots?" inquired Mr. Pook, staring down upon them.

"They're white," said the rough little girl.

"Fine and white too," responded Mr. Pook. "Didn't you tell my little lass this was to be an outdoor garden party affair and to come dressed according?"

"I didn't tell her it was to be a yachting affair," said the rough little girl. "Those boots, with that suit, would be all right on a yacht. At this Speech Day to-day they'll simply make you a figure of shame."

Mr. Pook sat down on the step of the car and regarded his cherisher gloomily. "Well, that's a good start, isn't it?" said Mr. Pook.

"It's a horrible start," corrected the rough little girl. "If I've got to cherish you to-day, you've got to —" she frowned for a word.

"Cherish myself," suggested Mr. Pook.

"Exactly," said the rough little girl, "and how you're going to cherish yourself in those boots, I can't see or imagine."

She said this so gravely and so determinedly that Mr. Pook, already nervous of his reception at the swagger and exclusive school, already impressed both by his daughter's letters and by this personal contact — by the obvious *savoir faire* of the rough little girl — stared at her as one arrived at a crisis in life's problems. "Can't walk about in my socks all day, can I?" he debated.

"You *can't*," said the rough little girl.

Despair was blown in an enormous gust from between the distended cheeks of Mr. Pook. "Seems to me I'd best go back," said he.

"Certainly *not*," said the rough little girl. "If I've got to cherish you, cherished you've got to be; never mind what happens. Just keep perfectly quiet, if you don't mind, while I think."

She stood with brows corrugated as beneath stupendous tension of thought, and she was watched, as she stood, with awe and with a great hush by Mr. Pook, by Lily Pook, and by the chauffeur of Mr. Pook.

"There's your chauffeur's boots," said the rough little girl.

The chauffeur, obsequious, brightened.

"They're worse," said the rough little girl.

The chauffeur, crushed, reddened.

"A bit yellow," said Mr. Pook, in the voice of one

who felt he must say something. "A bit yellow for this suit."

"Too yellow," said the rough little girl. She darted a sudden questioning arm towards Mr. Pook. "Just tell me this, Would you consider it an extravagance to buy a new pair of boots?"

"It would need a bigger thing than a pair of boots for me to call extravagant," said Mr. Pook, and he spoke the words with a smile slightly grim.

"Well, you'll want a pretty big pair," said the rough little girl. "If you ask me, your feet are simply enormous."

The smile left the face of Mr. Pook. He said soberly, "I can afford it."

"Then that's what we'll do," said the rough little girl brightly. "There's a shop in the town and we'll do it at once."

They drove to the town and they entered the shop. "Can you afford patent leather?" said the rough little girl.

"I think I can," said Mr. Pook.

"Then you can have patent leather," said the rough little girl.

"Thank you," said Mr. Pook.

"This gentleman," said the rough little girl to the shop assistant, "would like a pair of patent leather boots, not too dear and not pointed."

The assistant stripped off the impossible white boot from one foot of Mr. Pook and measured the foot.

"And see," said the rough little girl, "that you give

him a nice roomy fit, because he's got to wear them to walk all day in."

"Certainly, miss," said the assistant.

A pair of boots approved by the rough little girl were placed upon the feet of Mr. Pook, and there followed an afternoon in which Mr. Pook trod painfully, but with feelings very novel to him and very agreeable to him, in the wake of the rough little girl. He trod painfully because the boots, though roomy, proved, as new patent leather will, not to be roomy enough. His feelings were novel and were very agreeable, because for the first time in his life he found himself received, nay made to feel at home, by a class of society which hitherto he had at once envied and loathed.

The rough little girl, as firmly cherishing Mr. Pook among the swagger and exclusive parents as she had cherished Lily Pook among the swagger and exclusive girls, took the great Colossus of porky puffs from group to group scattered about the garden, introduced him, set him down in the heart of each group, immersed him and piloted him in that group's conversation, and at the proper interval of time collected him from that group and conducted him to similar amenities in another group.

"This is Mr. Pook," was the rough little girl's formula. "He is the father of my greatest friend, Lily Pook. This is Lily Pook. And he lives at Chilperine Castle, where we used to live. Sit down, Mr. Pook." And there were joined to this formula high-sounding names and highly distinguished titles belonging to the other parties to the introduction that caused Mr. Pook

to sit down with the sense of sitting in the seats of the mighty and with the gratification thereof. As to the owners of these names and these titles, whether it was that they were tickled, or whether it was that they were touched, by the cherishment of Mr. Pook by the rough little girl, unquestionably they showed to Mr. Pook that hearts just as kind and rare beat all about Mayfair as in the lowly air of porky puff palaces. They welcomed Mr. Pook and what is more, getting in conversation with him, they enjoyed Mr. Pook and liked Mr. Pook. "Have you met," they said to one another, "that Mr. Pook with that too comic Brenda Chilperine? He's delicious. He really is delightful."

It was a thrilled Mr. Pook, but it was also a profoundly touched Mr. Pook, that as evening fell stood beside the terrific car in process of taking leave of the rough little girl. Having thanked her, not effusively, for some instinct told him effusive thanks, like white boots, were not acceptable to the rough little girl's idea of cherishment, "I suppose," said he, embarrassed, "I couldn't give you a little tip, like as I'm going to give my Lily?"

"It would depend," said the rough little girl frankly, "on how much it was."

Mr. Pook was taken aback. "Would five pounds," said he nervously, "be all right?"

"Five pounds," said the rough little girl in her impatient way, "would be perfectly ridiculous. If you like to give me five shillings I think it would be very kind of you, and I will write you a letter to thank you."

"There is no occasion," said Mr. Pook, "to do that."

He handed her two half-crowns. "There's only one way for me to say the amount of things I'd like to say, and that is that you're a real little lady, a real one. What was it you said when we met you were going to do to me, same as you said you had done to Lily?"

"Cherish you," said the rough little girl.

"You have," said Mr. Pook emphatically. "Do you mind telling me — it's been rather a job, hasn't it, rather a bit of work, all that cherishing this afternoon?"

"At the beginning," replied the rough little girl, "it was rather a strain."

"I reckon," said Mr. Pook.

"You needn't mind," said the rough little girl. I didn't do it because I *wanted* to do it. I did it because I *had* to do it. I've got to cherish Lily, and I supposed I had to cherish you, because I'm a Chilperine."

Mr. Pook stared upon the rough little girl meditatively. "I daresay," said he, "it's not all jam being a Chilperine."

"I daresay," said the rough little girl, "it's not all porky puff being a Pook."

"You're right," said Mr. Pook.

IV

The story now takes a turn, at once hackneyed and sentimental, which I detest and something like which I have been dreading all the time. If only I could invent stories for myself instead of telling other people's, I never would stoop to the smell of smoke and

the clanging of a great bell to which the rough little girl one night awoke. Of course you guess at once what has happened and what is going to happen. The swagger and exclusive school was on fire. Brenda skipped out of bed, stuffed on her shoes, jerked up her wrapper and simply rushed. She gave never a thought to Lily Pook. She never imagined this was a real fire. At least twice in every term that bell used to startle the swagger and exclusive girls out of their sleep and send them hustling to their established places in the great hall in the delirious excitement of fire drill. There were prizes for the girls who got there in three minutes from the alarm, and punishment (forfeits) for the girls who did not get there in five. Hence never a thought of Lily Pook, only the skipping out, the stuffing on, the jerking up and the rushing down. True, a smell of smoke had never before been present with the alarm bell, but in the excitement to be down among the prize-winners Brenda scarcely noticed it.

She noticed it very dreadfully as in the mob of others she fled downstairs and into the hall. Also horrible crackling noises; also strange heat; also no stopping in the hall. Mistresses were there to shout, "In the garden! In the garden! Take your places on the lawn!" and they were all in their places, much agitated, hysterically squeaking as to some of them, hysterically exclaiming as to nearly all at the horrid sight of red and yellow light glowing angrily behind the window panes, before ever to Brenda came the thought of Lily. Indeed, it only came when simultaneously it came to all the rest of that frightened throng.

The first rule in the principles of that fire drill was the taking of a roll call. A mistress well accustomed to the list, comporting herself with superb calm in this terrible crisis, rattled off the names. The swagger and exclusive girls, well accustomed to the order of their names, and comporting themselves now with automatic precision, rattled out responses. One name (its owner recently joined) was pencilled at the foot of the list. One girl, for the like reason, never yet had participated in a fire drill; knew not the meaning of the great bell; did not respond when at last her name was called.

"Lily Pook!" cried the mistress, and stopped; and there seemed to be in all that din a dreadful silence. "Lily Pook!" she cried again; and there came a cold clutch to the heart of Brenda; and now indeed was panic. "Where is Lily Pook?" cried the mistress. "Has any one seen Lily Pook?" And using the smooth little girl's funny little name "Pook! Pook!" cried all the swagger and exclusive misses. "Pook! Pook! Pook!"

I ought to have said (but you have doubtless guessed it) that, as always happens in stories of this kind, the nearest fire engine was miles and miles away. No men were attached to this swagger and exclusive school. Men, indeed, were firmly kept away from it. The very gardeners were lady gardeners; the lady principal's chauffeur was a lady chauffeur; and now, while men for the first time in the history of that swagger and exclusive school were very badly wanted, and while still that frightened throng wailed "Pook! Pook!" into the night; their wails suddenly were changed to screams

of "Brenda! Brenda!" also of "Stop her! Stop her!"

Again you can guess. It always happens in stories of this kind. There came to the rough little girl the dreadful knowledge that here, in the absence of that Pook, her trust was betrayed. The Pook whom it was her duty, because she was a Chilperine, to cherish, was not being cherished. She was, on the contrary, being burnt alive.

A Pilgrim Knight, that is to say a Chilperine, cannot stand by and see that happen.

As countless heroines have done before, but much more fearfully, because, although she was a Chilperine, she was not really a heroine, the rough little girl fled across the lawn and into the great hall and up the stairs and down the corridors and into the room jointly shared. She went by no means so swiftly as this is written. In some stages she went very slowly. Once, when half-way up the stairs, she went back. She was very frightened, and she had occasion to be very frightened. There was smoke and there were flames and there was very great heat and there was a most terrible rending and crackling.

"I am the Pilgrim Knight."

It is not the kind of thing that a little girl would say or think, horribly situated as was this little girl, but I have to state and to emphasise that she did say it. She went back once in the great hall; and she said, "I am the Pilgrim Knight!" and she went on again. She went back once on the first landing; and she said, "I am the Pilgrim Knight," and she went on again. She

went back once on the second flight of stairs; and she saw, not in the direction on which she had turned her back, but in the direction towards which now stood her face, that which most terribly dismayed her. In the brief instant since her passage of the flight below, flames had appeared where flames had not been. They were leaping up and they leapt, from the landing to the stairs, with a horrible fluttering sound, like a flag drumming in a great wind.

That was what beneath her the rough little girl saw; and it was perfectly clear to her that, if those stairs were to be descended and safety reached, they must be descended now, at once, with all possible speed, or never.

She nerved herself for that terrible rush to lovely safety; and at the pitch of her nerving, that is to say on her tiptoes, with her breath held up to bursting, with one hand stretched down the balustrade, with the other frantically caught to her small bosom, she remembered a thing that her people had been saying ever since the first Chilperine said it to William the Conqueror; and tears of fright rushed to her eyes and streamed out of her eyes and she said it.

"I am the Pilgrim Knight!" she said; and she turned and took those stairs again.

She kept repeating it now. She had to. "I am the Pilgrim Knight! I am the Pilgrim Knight! I am the Pilgrim Knight!" She said it over and over again, very fast and very fierce. She had to; she would have gone back else.

Well, that is the easiest bit of that part, and the rest has to be hurried over because it is rather painful.

The rough little girl found the smooth little girl cowering beside the window of her room. The smooth little girl cried, "Oh, Brenda! Brenda!" The rough little girl, recovering at sight of the smooth little girl something of her normal attitude towards her, cried "Oh, *Pook!* I must say you are the most maddening and infuriating and senseless Pook! Whatever on earth did you stay up here for?"

She caught the smooth little girl by the hand and dragged her (she had to be dragged) to the head of the stairs.

But beyond the first flight there were no stairs; there were only flames.

"Now, you see," cried the rough little girl, "what you have done! Pook, you ought to be *boiled*."

As the smooth little girl was in more than considerable danger of being within a very few minutes burnt, this was no very alarming threat; and there came almost immediately new terrors very terrible, which lost the rough little girl the confidence that came to her by resumption of her bullying and hectoring ways. There came up the well of the staircase a sudden giant flame that leapt like a spontaneous combustion of the air about them. They staggered back and Lily screamed.

"We are going to die! We are going to die!" she cried, and clutched both her arms around the other.

The rough little girl kissed her. "Darling Pook," she said, "we are not. Darling Pook, you have *only* got to be brave."

There was a short passage here and the rough little girl took the smooth little girl to the window at the end of it. At the end of the long corridor on this landing was a fire escape. At the end of this passage there was no fire escape and the corridor could not be reached.

The rough little girl threw up the lower sash of the window. It very fortunately gave on to the lawn where had assembled the girls. They were to be seen now, from that great height, as midgets performing as it were antics. The school fire brigade had found their senses and their implements. With a hand pump and a hose they were directing what looked to be a thin pencil of water against the buildings. Other girls — the roll-call ranks, under strain of Brenda's dramatic flight, abandoned — ran excitedly to and fro, stopping at useful points to search the windows; others in groups stood rooted, staring.

Brenda showed herself. The puppets, as though jerked by simultaneous movement of every string, whirled into agitation of tossing arms and running feet. They collected in a crowd. There came up thin wisps of voices piping "Brenda! Brenda!" The smooth little girl was seen. "Pook! Pook!" arose the piping notes.

It was told afterwards by a mistress: "We knew they were cut off from the fire escape on their landing, for we had seen flames from the window where it was fastened. We were distracted. That brave child, in her dreadful peril, had more sense than we. She remembered what in our distraction we forgot, the jumping sheet that was supplied with our fire-brigade equip-

ment and that at our fire drill we used to hold for girls of the gym eight to jump into from the first floor; quite low, you know. Brenda could not make us hear. She got out on the window sill and that, because we were terrified she was going to throw herself down, reminded us. What courage, what coolness of thought by such means to remind us! We fled for the sheet, and every one for whom there was room hung on it with their full weight as at our drill we had learnt. And then — ”

The sheet looked to Brenda not so small as a large pocket handkerchief, but not so big as a small tablecloth. Brenda felt sick. She glanced back along the passage.

It would be an exaggeration to say that what Brenda saw along the passage informed her that not minutes but only seconds remained for life up there. Minutes remained, but they were in number very, very few. Brenda said, “Darling Pook, you must jump.”

Lily most dreadfully shrieked, “Brenda, I can’t, I can’t!”

The rough little girl said, “Darling Pook!” and began to lift her.

The smooth little girl screamed, “Brenda! Brenda!” and at that her smooth little knees collapsed.

She was fainted.

The rough little girl tried to raise her and found, because she was very hurried and very terrified, that she could not raise her. She leaned from the window and thereupon the lawn screamed to her “Jump! Jump!”

She put a leg over the window sill and again looked down, and they screamed more loudly than before "Jump! Jump!" She drew up the other leg and began, very quickly, to thrust it over; and she looked back and looked down at the smooth little girl, crumpled; and she did not say it herself, but it was said for her into her by the spirit that stretched back to the first Chilperine and that frequently, at moments like this, found a voice for itself, much disturbing the living stuff. It was said for her into her "You are a Chilperine."

So she caught at her breath and she drew back her legs and she was not seen by those who from the lawn screamed, "Jump, Brenda, jump!"

There immediately was seen by them instead the form of the smooth little girl, which first was on the window ledge, and then between the arms of the rough little girl was suspended above the sheet, and then came whizzing, and miraculously was caught upon the sheet, and bounced, but not much, and was caught again, and was deposited, unhurt, upon the lawn.

You know, it's confusion when you are swagger and exclusive girls, and not trained firemen, holding a jumping sheet, and a body comes thudding into it. You can't be ready again at once, you know.

There *was* confusion; and while that confusion, as they say, "reigned," there was a mighty crash and a bursting up to heaven of sparks that flames, as if they chased them, clutched at with angry fingers; and that was part, not all, of the roof gone in; and there were shouts, and men, and rushings, and that was the fire

brigade arrived and running a snake of ladders to the house; and there was every eye towards one point, and every heart in dread towards it, and that was where the little girl that was rough had been . . . and was not.

Up went that snake of ladders and up the first, *pit-a-pat!* my goodness, how he goes! a giant fellow with a shining hat; and up the next, and *flick!* another is shot up before him; and he's up that, and *flick!* he's up again. *Pit-a-pat!* my word, his feet and hands aren't feet and hands, they're four spots racing. Up, up; up, up; my life, that man's a sailor! He's up. His hands are at the window. Up goes his leg. He's gone. My stars, he hadn't touched the top before he — *flick* — was vanished; before he — LOOK! Print it in shouts, before he — LOOK! HE'S GOT HER! ON HIS SHOULDER! CHEER! HE'S OUT! HE'S COMING DOWN! CHEER! CHEER, GIRLS, CHEER AGAIN! Here, let me out, I've got something in my eyes, confound it!

(I say, that's the way to tell a story!)

V

The rough little girl passed through a number of scenes and among a number of faces very decidedly bewildering to her. The first face upon which she squarely got her eye was, astoundingly, the large, red face, gazing upon her from the foot of the bed, of Mr. Pook. The next face, standing beside her, was the face of Lily Pook; and the first scene, enframing these faces, clearly observed by the rough little girl was,

amazingly, the very dear and familiar scene of her own bedroom at Chilperine Castle. She then, with effect much more stabilizing, perceived on the other side of her, smiling at her, the face of her mother.

In every story of this kind that I have ever read, the first words of the rough little girl would have been, "Is Pook safe?" A beatific smile would then have adorned her face. She then would have said she heard the sound of angels' music; and then, very beautifully, would have died. I hate to write that her first words were, instead, quite calmly, "Cherishable, is this my room at Chilperine?" She then said, "How lovely!" and she then incontinently went to sleep.

What had happened was that Mr. Pook, hearing by telephone of the disaster, had rushed over to the school in his terrific car; and hearing there of his daughter's peril and rescue had first fallen on his knees and shed from his eyes tears, almost as big as his own porky puffs, of thanksgiving and gratitude; and had then conveyed the rough little girl, together with his own smooth little girl, back to the castle, which, said he subsequently, and brokenly, to the mother of the rough little girl, "She's never going to leave, madam. I knew her weeks ago, madam, for the finest little lady that ever stepped; and she's showed herself the bravest little lady. 'I am a Chilperine,' she said to me that day I went there; and I reckon she is, and the best of 'em. And I reckon she belongs here, and I reckon Chilperine belongs to her; and say what you like, madam, it is hers."

This "say what you like" was because, earlier in the

conversation, the mother of the rough little girl, seeing that Mr. Pook was really serious in his remarkable intention, had pointed out, very kindly (she also being much moved) but very firmly, that the most celebrated home in England cannot possibly be given to a small schoolgirl whose family has had to sell it because unable to afford the upkeep of it.

“That must, altogether apart from anything else, be plain to you, dear Mr. Pook,” said the mother of the rough little girl.

“What’s plain to me,” said Mr. Pook, “is that my little lass is worth to me all the castles in England, and that that little lady upstairs is worth all the castles in England. There’s an idea suddenly come to me, madam, and I’ll go right to my study and do it now. I’ll not tell you what it is, madam, till it’s done. But I’ll tell you what it’s come to me out of. This castle isn’t for my sort. I’m going to give it where it belongs; and your brave little lady that belongs to it as much as the walls belong to it, I’m going to give her too.”

With this strange saying Mr. Pook went to his study, wrote upon a sheet of paper “To the Right Honorable the Prime Minister — Sir . . .” and brought to an end this story. Some newspaper extracts can close it. First those headlines in perfectly enormous type, which one day burst out of the Press:

CHILPERINE FOR THE NATION

MUNIFICENT BEQUEST
BY MR. SAMUEL POOK

Then just a sentence from the enthusiastic leading articles accompanying them.

"Particularly happy, we may say particularly beautiful, is the sole condition on which this princely benefactor of the nation makes his gift. . . . 'Chilperine,' as he says, 'would not be Chilperine without a Chilperine.' . . . A sum of money has been set aside by Mr. Pook for purposes of this private upkeep. . . . Miss Brenda Chilperine will for her lifetime own and dwell in the castle. . . . Mrs. Chilperine, as her accompanying letter shows, on behalf of her daughter has accepted the trust."

More Press Extracts. This one from a New Year Honours List:

TO BE BARONS.

Mr. Samuel Pook.

(Donor of Chilperine to the nation.)

And then this one, not long after, which first has to be prefaced by words said by Mrs. Chilperine to Mr. Pook during one of the holidays which always the smooth little girl and her father spent with the rough little girl and her mother. "Mr. Pook, I insist. Your name must go down with the Chilperine name. Look what you have done for it. Yes, that is to be your title, please."

This one:

"Mr. Samuel Pook, on his elevation to the peerage, has assumed the title of Lord Pook of Chilperine."

The rough little girl showed it to the smooth little girl. "And mind you, Pook," said the rough little

girl, speaking with some difficulty, for her mouth was full, "and mind you, Pook, it sounds jolly well, I think. 'Lord Pook of Chilperine.' Now I vote we have just one more porky puff and that's all."

THE SWORDSMAN

THE SWORDSMAN

This is how Old Wirk tells a story:

“ I fot at the ba’le o’ Waterloo-oo-oo.”

Some explanation is needed. Manifestly Old Wirk never fought at the battle of Waterloo. But he imagines he did. He is eighty; he is in his dotage; he has never been out of Penny Green in his life, and his father was never out of it before him. But his grandfather fought at Waterloo. His grandfather, it is clear, over and over again told his infant grandson that story, and many another story of his life and times; and now Old Wirk, living again his childhood, reproduces stories precisely as, in that childhood, he had them from his grandfather’s lips. He never, in telling things told him by his grandfather, says, “ My grandfer did so and so.” He always says, “ I did so and so,” and, when reasoned with, can by no means be made to believe that he didn’t.

Thus comes “ I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo ”; and the reduplication of the final syllable is because Old Wirk was some years ago presented by public subscription with a set of false teeth; and they get unshipped with certain articulations, and his cheeks and his chin and his tongue churn them round and round while his listeners sit patiently for him to catch and control them and get on with it. But he is very proud of his false

teeth, and never takes them out except for his meals, a singularity that gave some offence to those who had subscribed for the teeth; but as Old Wirk said, "I've ate wi' me gooms these score years or more, an' I never can ate clean an' sharp an' healthy not but only with me goo-oo-ooms."

Old Wirk owns and lives at the forge on Penny Green. He is long past work at the anvil, but he still can do a turn at the bellows; and for the rest he sits all day on his bench beside the forge, ceaselessly moving his jaws round and round and round, and in the mind behind his extraordinarily bright blue eyes (clear and shining as a child's), revolving round and round and round a hopelessly confused mixture of his own youth, of his father's youth, and of his grandfather's youth.

Precisely at seven every summer evening he crosses the road to the Tybar Arms, and there sits with his pot of ale and the sires of the village, contributing his part to the debates, and, when these touch the past, doing so as the contemporary of those whose tombs are already overgrown and misshapen in the churchyard up the lane.

It was on one such evening that young Mark Sabre (who told me this), recently come to live at Penny Green and much appealed to by the antiquities of the village, material and corporeal, asked Old Wirk what was the story of the ghost which was supposed to haunt the Green and to walk it on summer nights, its head beneath its arm.

"Mrs. Pithycomb told me," said Sabre, "it was some way connected with that green patch where the children

never play ” — and he pointed to a vivid brightness in the Green’s burnt summer aspect about which lay the remains of wooden rails which one time had fenced it off. “ Is that right, Mr. Wirk? ”

Old Wirk churned his cheeks and tongue and chin, and might be imagined churning also the confused medley within his brain.

“ Ou-ai,” said Old Wirk, “ ou-ai. That’s right enough. Green’s harnted. Green’s harnted, as many a frightened soul ’a’ seen with his own eyes. Willie Pringle harnts un, an’ yon patch with the rails is where a’ lies an’ where a’ rises. Ou-ai, Willie Pringle was buried in churchyard, an’ stone stands there for any man to see. But Willie Pringle no lies there. Earth hadn’t laid on Willie Pringle mor’n a week when four very old and sober men, sitting on this very bench on a full-moon night, saw Willie’s awful shape up out of yonder place and seek his head and find it lying there and start towards them, head under arm, for to ask them join it to his shoulders. Ou-ai, they run, they run like young chaps for all their rheumatics. Ou-ai, they surely did, for I met un running; an’ ever after Willie Pringle in’s chosen time has rise there an’ took his head an’ walked the Green for one to join it for un. An’ never will rest till he finds one, for that’s the curse that’s set on un.”

Sabre asked, “ How came he to lose his head, Mr. Wirk? ”

“ Why, be sure, be sure, that’s a tale I’ve told ’ee a two-score times an’ more. ’Tis a terrible tale, to be sure, an’ a grave warning to maid an’ man alike. Willie

Pringle lost his head after Corporal Harry come home from the great ba'le o' Waterloo-oo-oo.

"Ou-ai, ou-ai, I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo. Drab take these teeth o' mine! Corporal Harry an' me, we fot together at Waterloo. 'Here they be coming, Zack,' shouts Corporal Harry in me ear; and surely there they were, they Frenchies, thundering on their great enormous horses of war, and waving their great enormous swords, and shouting in the language of theirs which no man can understand, and which was put on them in confusion of tongues at the Tower of Babel.

"Ou-ai, they were most terrible and mighty to look upon, and the hoofs of their horses smote the ground like thunder as down they come upon us. I were in the fourth rank, standing, and I wished I might have been in the front, kneeling, that my prayers would be more acceptable to God; for I was a sharp and wicked sinner when I was a young man, and in the square at Waterloo I made certain sure I would be before the Judgment Throne with every bullet I bit with my teeth or whiles I rammed it with my rammer-rod.

"Ou-ai, dree-four times they mighty an' enormous horses of war come down on us, an' dree-four times drew off an' come again; an' I was drenched an' dripping with blood from horses I put me bagganet to from under, and blood of men I forked from their saddles like trusses of hay at the thrashing.

"Ou-ai, 'twas where I lost my arm, at Waterloo. I mind him now, the mighty an' ferocious Frenchie that took my arm from me. I see him now. His horse could by no means fall for the bagganets that upheld

him. An' he sat atop on his dead beast an' slashed most terrible all about him. An' he see me eye to eye, an' swings back his mighty sword till his arm to the elbow was over his shoulder, an', thinks I, 'I'll take thee with me, Frenchie, if so be my hour is now come.' An' I set my foot on the bodies before me, an' I ups an' gives him my bagganet straight to his throat; an' he comes swish with his sword, an' I goes ha! with my bagganet, an' a most terrible dizziness comes over me; an' I mind I said to one, 'Draw me from here'; an' a' bawls to me, 'Nay, tha' must die first, Zack'; which was the order of the day that every man in the square must die where a' stood an' move no foot till a' dropped dead."

Old Wirk paused and stared before him with bemused eyes as though he saw again those sights which in actual fact he had never seen; or as if, Sabre thought, watching him, some rift of his own individuality struck into the clouds of his fancies and held him puzzled. But he shook his head as though to shake it clear, and declared, "Ou-ai, that's how I lost my arm at the great ba'le of Waterloo-oo-oo."

One of the younger men, with a wink and a nod, called Sabre's attention to a bit of sport.

"Why, but, granfer, tha's got thy arms, both on un."

Old Wirk stared at his two hands, one on either knee before him, and raised and stared at one and then the other. His questioner tittered, and from others of the group were capacious "Haw-haws."

The old man turned on them sharply. "Tell 'ee I lost me arm at Waterloo-oo-oo. Tell 'ee I did!"

Sabre shook his head in reproof at the mockers and pushed the ale-pot to Old Wirk's trembling hand. "Go on, Mr. Wirk; go on. You're telling us about the ghost, about how Corporal Harry came home from Waterloo."

Old Wirk brightened and wetted and gulped. "Ou-ai, ou-ai, when Corporal Harry come home from Waterloo. To be sure, to be sure, the terrible thing that it was for mortal eye to behold.

"Ou-ai, those were days; they surely were days. Us run for sojers, Corporal Harry an' me. Us run for sojers, we surely did. I mind me well the day the sojers come, an' round an' round the green they marched with drum an' colours an' a great mighty sergeant with a handful of favours that a' waves and shouts like the grandly man a' surely was. An a' sings:

'With a rub-dub-dub,
An' a fol-lol-lol!'

an' all the children laughing an' jumping beside un; an' all the maids smiling and blushing; an' all the young men standing about main silly-looking an' twisting up their smocks in their hands.

"Ou-ai, dree-four times they go round the green with the drum an' colours; an' then they stand up here afore the inn an' the great an' mighty sergeant shouts, 'Now then, my likely lads! Now then, my true-born British likely lads, here's a pocket full o' shillings an' a

knapsack full o' ribbons, an' who's the likely lads, the true-born British likely lads, that's going to have un?'

"Ou-ai, I see un now, that grandly man, here on this very spot, jingling his shillings an' a-shaking his ribbons; an' a goodwife cries out to un, 'Get away home, ye powerful an' wicked sojer man,' she calls out. 'There's no likely lads here for 'ee, an' no war here for likely lads to be murdered and shattered in. These be no fighting parts,' she tells un. 'Be off wi' ye, an' shame on 'ee.'

"That grandly man a-shakes his head an' rattles his shillings, an' smiles an' laughs, an' 'My likely lads, my likely lads,' says he, 'thy goodwife there would keep ye to tie her skirts till ye be old women too. My likely lads, the King's a-calling for ye one an' all to catch Bonaparty, the scourge of Europe, an' who will stop to home when the King's a-calling him? Who'll wear a smock when a' can wear a fine red coat?'

"An' with that he sets off, and they all sets off, walking in a circle here, with the drum tapping an' the colours flying, an' that grandly man singing:

' With a rub-a-dub-dub,
An' a fol-lol-lol!'

an' giving a shilling an' pinning a favour here an' there to half a score on us. Right opposite me a' 'halts and cries, 'Now one for you, my likely lad. I warrant me the King's got the likeliest lad in all England here.'

"Ou-ai, so a' did say, to be sure, for I was a rare an' likely lad in those days, an' none in all the village to set beside me, save only Corporal Harry, who was a

lusty an' mighty one as ever woman come abed to in these parts. Ou-ai, a' certainly was. But he was no corporal then, 'ee mind me, nor him nor me going for sojers then, having a most daring and terrible adventure to our hands which were to come to pass that very night; so that us stood away an' let the sojers an' the chaps go marching off, while we shaped for it.

"You mind me, there was in the land in those days many a Frenchie that was gentle born in a's own country that was prisoner to us an' that lived with folks on parole, as they named it, which was his solemn word pledged on's sword that a' would not escape. One an' another I've see'd in they days, an' one there was a year an' more in the village here. A' was called Mouser, which is what they all are named in their own country, an' a' lived here with Mr. Crawshaw at the white house yonder."

This roused Sabre. "Crawshaws" was the house he had just come to live in. "Crawshaw!" he exclaimed animatedly. "Why, it's the house I've taken — the house I live in! 'Crawshaws' it's called; and that's the reason, eh? And a French officer lived there on parole in the Napoleonic days! By Jove, that's interesting! By Jove, fancy that! Go on, Mr. Wirk; do go on."

"Ou-ai," nodded Old Wirk, in no way understanding Sabre's excitement, but thoroughly well pleased at having been the cause of it. "Ou-ai, 'twas there with Mr. Crawshaw this Mouser lived; an' a' was a pleasant fair-spoken gentleman an' terrible polite. A' would take off a's hat to the lowliest woman; an' a' would

buy sweeties for the children; an' a' would make paper boats for un on the pond; an' a' would set here on the bench with us an' laugh an' jabber a's parley-voo; an' a' would try drink pot o' ale an' screw up a's face like a man with vinegar in a's mouth, an' us ud laugh; to be sure how we did laugh to see un!

"A' could speak nobbut a word an' a word of English, an' no man understand un when a' did, an' 'twas long o' that that Harry an' me come to run for sojers. Harry saw a main deal o' this Mouser, for a' was courting Prudence that was wench in Mr. Crawshaw's kitchen. An' a' tells me, Harry, that this was none the only courting at that house. Often as he be there, a' tells me, a' sees this Mouser walking the garden with Mr. Crawshaw's lass, Mistress Anne. An' there come a day when a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'there's fifty guineas to be had for putting the Mouser over to Sandwich, by Dover, in Kent, to smugglers that wait to run un to France.'

"I says to un, 'Harry,' I says, ' 'tis a hanging job '; an' a' laughs an' says, 'Drabbit, man,' a' says, 'tis a fifty-guinea job an' tho'llt have five-an'-twenty, Zack, an' I'll have five-an'-twenty an' my Prudence likewise, which the lass'll marry me when we get the Mouser safe away.'

"I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I were a rare un in those days, an' ready to chance my neck for any bi' fun, leave alone a pocket of guineas, so I gives ear to un, an' a' tells me.

"A' tells me a rare tangle o' stuff. A' tells me a' was going to do this for Prudence, an' Prudence she

be doing it for Mistress Anne, an' Mistress Anne she be doing it for the Mouser, an' the Mouser he be doing it for to see his mother that were dying; an' me, chaps, I did be going to do it for the adventure of it an' for the tidy pocket of guineas, an' because I always did what Harry did. Ou-ai, 'twas a rare tangle of reasons, it surely was.

"Me an' Harry we went over along to Mr. Crawshaw's that night, an' in the garden we settled it all to rights, Harry an' me an' Mistress Anne an' Prudence an' the Mouser. The Mouser were a fine bold man, he surely were, an' a rare well-looking un. I mind me he had his arm about Mistress Anne while we talked, an' rare an' sweet she looked at he with tears in her eyes while she asked Harry an' me to take care of un on the road an' see that no mortal ill befell him.

"Mouser's trouble, ye see, chaps, was that a' could speak no English, which was why he surely could not travel the roads alone; an' Mistress Anne she made it for us that, when we meet folk on the road, Harry an' me'd be two young chaps taking to Dover a gentleman that was deaf mute from his cradle an' no could talk an' no could hear; an' 'twas so arranged, an' on a fine clear evening we set out, the dree on us, a hunner an' fifty miles an' all, an' us in reckoning to meet the smugglers on the tenth day forward — twenty mile a day and two-dree days to spare.

"Us were gay an' lively company, for all the Mouser could not speak to be understood. We were young chaps an' mighty lusty an' free, an' it surely is good to be young an' never a fear an' only a laugh for all that

betides, come ill, come good. Us was like, as it were, taking a holiday: the Mouser setting for his home; an' Harry an' me, that had lived long years on the Green, seeing new sights such as only once be new to a man, an' never the like again.

"Ou-ai, an' what sights there were, to be sure. Why, a strong an' lively young man might walk the roads in these quiet an' peaceable times an' see nary a single strange thing to set un staring. I tell 'ee 'twas no such in they tearing days. I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, we see with our own eyes a man with a bear and a monkey to set to dance like mortal folk; an' in one village us watched a play with puppets that was called 'The Sad Husband,' an' that was most wonderful to see; an' there'd be folks travelling post with four horses an' all laid out at a stretch; an' there'd be a rich lord an's lady travelling in fine coach with cock horse behind for to take un up hills; an' there'd be sober an' respectful gentlemen on a good horse with lady on pillion behind un; an' there'd be trade-folk with pack-horse, with rare fine stuffs on un, I warrant me; an' there'd be a chap jog by on a nag, an' presently us overtake nag tied to post, an' presently soon another chap jog by us on same nag, which was a common mode of travel in they days for two with one horse between un, travelling 'ride an' tie,' as 'twas called. An' once we see at an inn where us bided the night two stern an' sour men that were Bow Street runners, Robin Red-breasts, as they called un, that were pursuing some evil breaker of the law. Ou-ai, a rare fright they give us, us thinking they was after we. But they surely were

not; an' while at first we were main cautious and fearful of all we met, we come bolder as the days run on an' none take no notice on us nor ask no questions.

"Ou-ai, right down into Kent we come, with never a slip nor hurt by the way; an' then the luck turn against us an' mischances come like water through a leakin' roof which 'ee stop one place an' a' starts in t'other.

"Two-score mile or more from Sandwich, by Dover, an' dree days from the night of meeting the smugglers, we come by an inn at nightfall an' made to pass the night there, an' stepped into kitchen an' found much company assembled an' mighty ungracious. Was a fine lady there an' a fine gentleman, with a wheel off their chaise, an' made to stop for the night along of it, an' mighty ill-pleased to tarry in such a place; an' two fine young officers bound for Dover, making company with them, an' they four desiring all the inn to themselves, an' looking at any that chanced in as so much dirt that must keep to one end an' sit there mum.

"Ou-ai, when we made entry, all dripping, for 'twas raining amain, 'La!' cries the fine lady, 'here be three more of the wretches. Why, this inn doth collect the raff of the roads like bugs in a straw bed. 'Tis monstrous unpleasant, and do but see how the stinking steam rises off their clothes! Is there no stable for such but they must press in where quality is?'

"With that she puts a bottle to her nose an' smells at it, an' her fine lord puts glass to his eye an' stares at us, an' the fine young officers put also bottles to their noses an' stare, an' the company beside the fire that

likely had been talked to thus, each in's turn, looked mighty sour upon us, which was to make favour with the fine folk, 'ee understand, an' show they had no lot nor part with such as we.

"Us made to take stools quiet by the fire, never liking, 'ee mind me, to call folks's regard to ourselves; but whiles we ate of our vittles, the quality folk must chatter on idle tongues at us, the common company sniggering to hear it, an' us mighty disturbed an' uncomfortable, I do assure 'ee.

"This Mouser, 'ee mind me, was dressed like sober an' decent gentleman, an' carried short sword by's side; an' the fine lady with her eye on un, 'Him wear a laced waistcoat,' she cries. 'La, 'tis monstrous strange to wear a laced waistcoat an' carry sword an' be keeping company with such! What manner of gentleman can that be that does so?'

"'Has a hang-dog look,' says her lord, quizzing the Mouser through his glass.

"'Fore George,' says one of the officers, 'has a nasty French look, or I never see a Frenchman that have run two-score through the body,' a' says.

"I tell 'ee, sir, I tell 'ee, chaps, I began to be sore afraid with this manner of talk, an' I put my elbow into Corporal Harry's side for him to say summat that could speak to quality more mannerly an' bold than ever the like o' me.

"Corporal Harry touches his lock in a well-behaved, sober, modest way, an' a' says, 'Thy pardon, madam,' a' says, 'thy pardon, sirs, the gentleman is no French but true-born English an's father is man of property

an' good estate beyond Dover. An' by thy kind leave, Lady, an' by the most terrible affliction of God, a's born deaf-mute an' neither speaks nor yet hears, an' be come from Bath where a most notable physician has seen un, an' be travelling now to a's father's estate — in our company an' protection, an' please thee.'

"Ou-ai, a' could speak properly, Corporal Harry could, remembering all that Mistress Anne had told un to say, an' saying it most bold an' convincing. But it surely was of no avail with they. 'A fine tale,' cried the lady. 'Keep it where 'tis asked of thee,' she cries. 'Speaking to thy betters! La!' cries she to the officers, 'tis a nice thing that I should be spoken up to my face by any dirt that pleases!'

"Her lord, that likely was accustomed to her such like whimseys, laughs; but one o' the young officers takes up with her. 'Will have the room cleared for 'ee, madam,' a' says to her, 'if it likes 'ee, madam,' a' says. 'But sound the precious mute if he be mute to French or to English only,' a' says. 'Try him with thy French, madam,' a' says.

"'Ee mind me, chaps, 'ee mind me, sir, the Mouser could understand no word of this that they was saying, an' for some cause I could no warn un; an' whiles I broke out a most cruel sweat all hot an' cold in all parts of my body, an' whiles I see by Corporal Harry's face that a' was suffering the same, the lady in a very quick an' sharp voice cries out some jabber of most foreign an' outlandish language; an' every man's eye was on the Mouser, watching him, an' to my most terrible horror an' fear, a' starts up a's head as though a' was

stung, an' a' flushes in the face red as a maid that have had a rude immodest word spoken to her.

"Ou-ai, it surely was a clever cunning trap as ever I did behold, an' that Mouser fair caught in un, an' Corporal Harry an' me fair caught along on un, an' all jumps to their feet an' shouts; an' I tell 'ee, chaps, I see plain before my eyes the most terrible an' alarming spectacle of myself hanging from gibbet for escaping a Frenchie like once had seen the body of a most lawless an' dangerous man swinging over to Chovensbury cross roads.

"Ou-ai, they all jump to their feet, one an' all, quality an' common company alike; an' the young officer hollers out, 'Fore George,' a' hollers, 'a villain Frenchman, as well I knew the minute I set eyes on un,' a' hollers. An' a' tugs out a's sword; an' the fine lady spits out some more French language; an' that Mouser, like as if it was some most terrible insult, goes red as turkey cock an' fires back some most fierce an' hissing language, an' the lady screams; an' 'Oh, the horrible villain!' she calls out; 'Oh, the disgusting French villain!' an' the officer comes at un with a's sword; an' the Mouser pulls out sword to un; an' one ups with a stool an' cracks un on head from behind; an' down a' goes crash; an' another catches my boots from beneath me an' down I goes on top of un; an' another runs in on Corporal Harry, an' Corporal Harry ups stool an' lends un a flick that splits skull for un; an' a' swings stool, Corporal Harry does, an' there surely never was such hard an' terrible battle in peaceable inn afore. Ou-ai, 'twas most terrible to behold

an' to hear, with shouting and most blasphemous oaths, an' the lady screaming, an' the young officers trying to run Harry through with swords an' no able to get near un for the press. Ou-ai, 'twas certainly most terrible to behold; but they was too many for Corporal Harry, lookee, and very soon a' was down an' a dozen upon un, an' soon all drie on us trussed with stout ropes an' pitched in stable.

"Ou-ai, there we surely were, the drie on us, in most sad an' alarming situation as ever mortal man could surely be in. I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I lay there in the dark most forlornly aching in every limb of my body where I'd been treaded on an' battered whiles I lay on the floor; an' I lay there most dismally beholding my poor sinful body swinging on gibbet, an' with all the glory departed out of our adventure that I had took up with so merry a heart, an' wishing most solemnly an' painfully that I never had started upon un, but had stayed home to Penny Green, content with my lot an' portion, like any sober an' proper young man should.

"Ou-ai, I were most sore amazed an' fearful; an' presently I says, 'Harry,' I says, 'we be in most sorrowful an' mortal plight,' I says to un; 'an' we best be preparing to meet our God,' I says; which, lookee, chaps, they'd hollered at us when they chuck us in stable that, come morning, the young officers would swear to us before magistrate at Dover an' have warrant out and officers of the law sent over for to fetch us to prison to trial an' execution.

"Corporal Harry give a laugh, an' I tell 'ee, chaps,

'twas no rueful laugh as 'ee might expect that a' gave, but a bold and merry laugh, for a' was ever a bold an' merry un, come lot, come scot; an' a' says, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tha can prepare to meet thy God, an't please thee, but first must prepare to get out from here; for I tell 'ee, Zack, 'ee can make collar for horse, but that's no putting a's head in un; an' they can make rope collar for me, but I surely am not going to wait here for to be fitted with un. I've my hands nigh free,' a' says, 'an' in nobbut a minute I'll free thine, an' us'll see if there be no way from here but the door,' a' says; 'which I see a crack in roof as I lie here on my back,' a' says, 'an' where there's a small crack there's way for a bigger,' a' says.

"Ay, marry, a' was a bold un, Corporal Harry. A' was presently searching round in dark on hands an' knees, an' a' found a billhook, an' in two-dree minutes a' cut my bonds, an' cut his'n; an' we cut free the Mouser that was groaning sore with crack on's head, but come to brave an' lively when we free un an' rouse un an' show un by pointing to broken rafters in roof what we would be after; an' presently soon Corporal Harry that was biggest stands straggle-leg beneath crack in roof, an' I climbs on's shoulders, an' the Mouser, that were a light an' nimble one, a' climbs on mine, an' a' takes billhook an' a' cuts away rafters that were rotten like cutting cheese, an' a' lays hold of beam, an' a' gives jump an' kick, an' a' sends Corporal Harry an' me sprawling, but a' clambers up, an' 'twas no very hard work for me off of Harry's shoulders to follow un.

“Ou-ai, there was Mouser an’ me on the roof; an’ we reach down my jacket an’ Corporal Harry fastens on to un, an’ a’ kicks an’ wriggles, an’ we hold on amain like our arms ud come out their sockets, an’ presently soon a’ catches my wrists an’ the Mouser lays hold of a’s hair, an’ a’ squeals an’ cries, ‘Drabbit, Zack,’ a’ cries, ‘make un leave go of my hair or a’ surely will pull scalp off top of my head.’ An’ I chokes a laugh out of me, pulling at un, an’ I says, ‘Better the scalp off tha head than tha head off tha body on gibbet,’ I says; an’ presently soon we pull un so a’ gets a’s arm through roof, an’ a’ swings a’s self up, an’ there we be, the dree on us, up on main top of roof, an’ it surely do make me dizzy to think of our most fearsome an’ perilous plight, right up in the sky an’ mortal dark all round, an’ no man to know how we should slip down pitch of roof, nor how then get to ground, nor what like manner of ground awaited for us to get down to.

“How us should ha’ settled un I surely do not know, but, whiles we sat to think on un, that Mouser somehow slips, an’ a’ gives a screech an’ away a’ goes, an’ there comes a rattle of tiles an’ another screech, an’ then a most mighty an’ alarming thud, an’ then language that was wicked oaths, sure enough, though in the French language, an’ not to be understood.

“Us no could help laughing, Harry an’ me, all terrible an’ alarming as our situation was, an’ then Harry says, ‘If a’ can swear a’ can live,’ a’ says; ‘an’ where a Mouser can go, I’m main sure I can follow,’ a’ says; ‘so here goes, Zack,’ a’ says, an’ a’ pushes the ridge of roof with a’s hands — a’ was laying sprawled out on’s

belly; 'ee mind me — an' away a' goes, slithering; an' there comes to me presently a breaking and then a thud, an' then most sinful and blasphemous oaths, which 'ee might fairly call the good English of the same words the Mouser had said.

“ I tell 'ee, chaps, I tell 'ee, sir, I had main little stomach for the terrible danger of casting myself loose an' following un; but there surely was less stomach in me for stopping where I be'd, what with the noise they two had made by their falling and their oaths, an' the mortal fear that was upon me of being taken to gibbet to hang by neck.

“ Wherefore I prayed a most solemn prayer that I should not break my neck nor hang by un neither, an' I let myself go with my hands, and down I slipped, tearing my stomach most cruel and painful; and I goes quicker an' quicker, and whizz! I goes over the edge, an' down I comes crash an' splash into most evil an' terrible muck-heap which my face buried in, an' which was what caused they other two to make the oaths they had sworn, an' would have me — for, God forgive me! chaps, I had no found religion in those days; but, 'ee mind me, I was that rare thankful not to have broken my neck nor no bones that my heart was filled more with praise than with blasphemy, as I do hope will be remembered for me when I come to face the awful Day of Judgment.

“ Ou-ai, I surely were thankful to think I were free with no harm done, for all I were soused and fair stinking with that muck-heap; ou-ai, 'twas thankful I was; but 'ee can think, chaps, 'ee can think, sir, the

great fright that descended upon me, an' upon they, at the very same instant; for I had done no more than raise me up when a window of the inn just beside of us was throwed up an' the voice of that fine lady shrieks with a most alarming and blood-curdling shriek. 'Murder!' she shrieks. 'Thieves, fire, murder, villains!' she shrieks. ''Tis they dree villains escaping!' she shrieks. 'Come to un, come to un, come to un!'

"With that comes shouts an' runnings an' bangings, an' all together such a terrible an' alarming din as ears surely never did hear before. An' Harry an' me an' that Mouser we run one way, an' men come pouring out of the ground, as you might believe, in front of us; an' up in a window some one calls out, 'Stand in the King's name!' but I was that terrified an' bewildered, running this way an' running that, that I would not ha' stood in the devil's name; an' he that had shouted then fires great blunderbus from window, an' bullets fly all round, an' some one lets out a screech, an' I runs into one man in's shirt an' trousers, an' I hits un a flick an' down a' goes; an' I hears Harry shouting, 'This way, Zack, this way, Zack!' and I sets for un, an' another man jumps up at me an' I goes for to flick un an' a' lets out a jabber, so I knowed un for Mouser, an' I takes his hand an' we run by wall an' over gate an' finds us on road, an' runs like all the powers of darkness was behind us; an' we come up with Harry an' all dree of us run; an' where we was to in the darkness I by no means could say; but the shouting back of us was soon not to be heard, an' us throws ourselves down an' pants an' sweats like 'ee

might think our lungs was bursting, which surely was how mine did feel."

Old Wirk had been reciting these passages relative to the escape from the inn with an animation in keeping with the scurrying hurly-burly of its action; now, as he came to the throwing of themselves down in exhaustion, so by exhaustion his narrative seemed to cease. His flow stopped; his jaws and lips and tongue churned vigorously, but churned silently; once, staring upon his listeners with his bright blue eyes, which appeared, however, to be regarding scenes much more remote, he said, "Ou-ai, 'twas a night of sore peril, a most perilous night it surely was," then the silent churning again — the apparent, and highly unsatisfactory end.

Chuckles at the blank surprise in Sabre's face rose from those seated about. One man took pity. "Well, but that ain't end, granfer," he called.

"Tell 'ee," said Old Wirk sharply, "tell 'ee that's how us run for sojers, Corporal Harry an' me."

"Gen'leman wants to hear end, granfer."

"Tell 'ee that's how us run for sojers. Tell 'ee that's how 'twas."

There came to Sabre the sudden wit to jump the aged man over the obvious hiatus. He leant forward and put his tobacco pouch on the lap of Old Wirk's smock. "I see, I see, Mr. Wirk. That's a splendid story. I see. There was such a search and an outcry after you when you'd got away that you and Harry went for soldiers somewhere near by, as the best way of keeping hid. Of course you did."

"Surely, surely," said the aged man, and filled his pipe with trembling old fingers.

"At Dover?"

"Nay, nay, nary Dover, sir. Us durst not show to Dover. Ramsgate. At Ramsgate 'twas that Harry an' me went for sojers. Ou-ai, all horses an' sojers an' powerful enormous cannons an' ships was at Ramsgate for the great army going for to sail to Portugal, which was the Peninsular, as they come to call un."

A ravishment of interest thrilled Sabre. He was fairly well up in the history of the Napoleonic wars. Astounding to meet in the flesh one who, as it were, had fought in the Peninsular campaign! The old man had no more fought in those battles than he had; but the trick of his failed brain caused him to produce stories of those days precisely as if he were the ghost of that grandsire of his come out of that stirring past whose history his musket had helped to shape. It thrilled Sabre. He told himself, "That's what he is! When he's like this he's not Old Wirk of to-day. He's just the spirit of his grandfather. By Jove, I'm talking to a chap who perhaps fought at Almeida, at Ciudad Rodrigo, at Albuera, who perhaps was with Moore at Corunna! Think of it!"

He addressed Old Wirk aloud. "At Ramsgate, of course it was, Mr. Wirk. That's where General — I've forgotten his name — some General or other sailed with a brigade for Portugal to join Wellington, who'd gone from Cork. You went with him, eh? You and Corporal Harry. A great army of you, eh? Scores of ships, weren't there?"

"Ou-ai," said Old Wirk, "ou-ai, a power of ships there surely was." He nodded and silently churned, and silently churned and nodded. He said, "Ou-ai, they ships! 'Twas terrible. Ah, terrible surely 'twas. One day we was all floating together like flock of ducks on a pond, and next day all scattered an' gone, an' us tossing in most terrible storm, an' many days tossing, an' terribly drove by most cruel storm, an' drove on to rocks an' shipwrecked, an' not above a score on us rescued to land which were by Portland in Dorset-sheer."

Sabre stared, puzzled, and then realised another hiatus in the drifting narrative and a hiatus much more vexing. The various expeditions to Portugal, that from Ramsgate included, had reached the seat of war in safety. It was after Sir John Moore's glorious retreat to Corunna that storm had caught the homeward transports, and strewn them, with their war-worn burthens, all along the Channel coast from Land's End to Dover. Old Wirk's grandfather *had* been at Corunna then, and annoying Old Wirk had jumped the whole campaign and straddled right across to its termination! Disappointing, disappointing! Sabre tried coaxingly to return the aged mind to the shores of the Peninsula, but Old Wirk only churned and developed not the smallest response to stimulus. Younger men sitting about laughed, and shortly began to move away: "He'll no' but talk when he's a mind to, sir." Veteran sires of the village who remained drew apart into their own gossip. Sabre, alone with Old Wirk, tried him this way and tried him that; and suddenly the

thread was taken up again — an interval of years between the dropped end and the end resumed, but still —

“But the ghost that haunts the Green, Mr. Wirk,” Sabre had said in desperation of final appeal. “That was what you were telling me, you know. You’ve got up to how you and Harry went for soldiers, and then how you fought in the Peninsula; but Waterloo was quite some years later, and you said the ghost came after that; you said the Green’s been haunted ever since Corporal Harry came back from Waterloo. The ghost of Willie — Willie Pringle. Now, do tell me, Mr. Wirk. After Waterloo — do tell me that.”

“Tell ’ee I fot at Waterloo-oo-oo,” announced Mr. Wirk suddenly and querulously.

“Of course you did. Of course you did. I know you did. And you were in the square, and Corporal Harry shouted, ‘Here they be coming, Zack,’ and down on you they thundered.”

The spring was touched. “Ou-ai,” said Old Wirk. “Ou-ai, they Frenchies thundering on their great enormous horses of war an’ waving their great enormous swords ——”

“But if he goes over it all again,” thought Sabre, “we shall just come back to the same place,” and he boldly interrupted. “Yes, well then, when Corporal Harry come back from Waterloo. How did he come back, Mr. Wirk?”

“He come back a blind man,” said Mr. Wirk.

Dramatic effect! Enticing possibilities! “Blind!” cried Sabre keenly. “He was blinded in the fighting,

eh? And came back with you? You brought him back?"

Old Wirk shook his head. "Nay, nay. I was nigh a twelvemonth returned afore Corporal Harry came back. Nigh a twelvemonth, an' had set my mind to it that he had bin killed, when a' suddenly comes, walking up the Green here as sudden as if he had sprung out of it. Ay, marry, and in nobbut two-dree hours walking off again, blind as a' was, an' none that knew un never set eye on un again, that day to this."

"But that was strange, Mr. Wirk, going off so soon like that. Why? What happened? Did something happen to make him go again at once?"

"Ou-ai," said Old Wirk. "Ou-ai, sommat surely did happen, an' the most terrible thing that ever mortal eye did behold. Lookee, sir, 'twas a fair day on the Green here, the day that Corporal Harry come back. There was tents an' booths an' giddy-go-round horses an' shooting galleries, an' all sorts of most wonderful an' most merry sights for to see. And there was may-pole an' lads an' lassies dancing round un, an' all merry an' beautiful as ever a holiday could be. An' while I stood watching the dancers, one says to me, 'Look, Zack,' a' says, 'what strange man be yon that comes this way?' An' I looks, an' one an' another looks, an' presently all be looking, an' a' comes straight into the middle of us, the strange figure that us see. A' was dressed in a sojer's coat, an' a' was smart an' trim an' pretty to look upon; an' a' whistled an' sung an' laughed as a' walked, an' a' carried in's hand a long sword that was like streak of lightning with the sun

that dazed upon un, an' was like brand of fire where a' held un, for that the handle was of beaten gold an' most beautiful to see.

"An' as a' comes, whistling an' singing, a' sometimes stops an' throws aloft the sword high, high till it was no but a shining star in the sky; an' a' holds up a's hand as though a' called to it, an' down like a lightning-flash it comes, an' the maids scream to see it rushing upon un, an' a' catches it in a's hand safe an' sure as a bird to its nest, an' a' twirls it round like a ring of fire, an' a' laughs an' throws an' catches an' twirls un again. An' while we stand an' stare a' calls out, 'Hey, my lassies,' a' calls out. 'Hey, my lassies; hey, my lads. Doth none know me? Doth none know me? I be come back from the wars to my home an' for my bride; an' I know my home, an' I know 'ee all, lads an' lassies, though I no can see home nor bride nor none of 'ee; but by the like of it, none knows me. Is old Zack not there that a' doth not know me?' a' says.

"An' I knew un then, for all a' looked so strange. An' a' calls out 'Harry!' to un, an' goes to un, an' one an' another that remembered un; for all a' had not bin to village for long years an' had growed uncommon, one an' another calls out, 'Why, 'tis Harry!' an' flocks about un; an' a' laughs an' banters, an' a' tells us a's blind, an' a' says that though he no can see his pretty bride, he's come for to fetch her; an' he asks, 'Where be she, then, my jolly playmates? Where be my sweetheart, my true love, my Prudence?'

"Ou-ai, a' asked 'em that; an' they look one upon another an' say no word; an' they look upon me as

saying 'twas me should tell un; an' they draw off an' leave us an' go back to their junketings; an' I says to un, 'Harry,' I says, 'thy maid Prudence be dead an' laid in churchyard.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'was she maid or mother when they laid her there?'

"An' I tells un, 'Mother.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'was she wife or widow?'

"An' a' tells un, 'Nay, Harry, nor wife nor widow were the lass.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'died she in her bed as a lass dies?'

"An' I tells un, 'Nary bed, Harry; in the stream by Puncher's farm they found her.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tis all gospel true, then, what the lass wrote in letter to me, an' what I heard from one by camp fire when us fot the Frenchies, Zack, an' what I heard from one in Tidborough town dree nights ago?'

"An' I tells un, 'Mortal true, Harry.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, ''twas Willie Pringle wronged the lass? 'Twas Willie Pringle took from me my bride, my pretty sweetheart, my pretty Prudence?'

"An' I tells un, 'Harry, 'twas.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'tell me, now, be Willie Pringle here on Green while Prudence lies in churchyard?'

"An' I looks with my eyes to maypole an' I tells un, 'Harry, ay.'

"An' a' says to me, 'Zack,' a' says, 'be Willie Pringle sporting an' laughing with the lassies an' lads while Prudence lies very cold in churchyard?'

"An' I tells un, 'Harry, ay.'

"A' turns to me, sir, an' a' says, 'Lead me down to un, Zack. Lead me right down to un. I lief would sport an' play with Willie Pringle.'

"Now lookee, sir, an' listen, for this is how 'twas. Harry among the lads an' lassies calls to un an' says to un, 'My lads an' lassies, my fond and friendly play-mates,' a' says, 'stand about me an' hark to me an' fine sport for the fair I'll give 'ee. Many fairs an' many inns I've made sport for in the Frenchies' land an' all along the roads from here to Dover. I can sport with a sword like blind man never sported yet — nay, nor yet man with eye in's head. See, lads an' lassies all, 'tis a gentleman's sword, a nobleman's sword, a prince's sword. From dead Frenchy I took un on field of Waterloo, an' see the hilt of gleaming gold with jewels, an' see the blade of true Damascus steel, lithe as a serpent, strong as an oak tree, quick as an adder's tongue, true as a lover to his lass. My lads an' lassies, when I should ha' come home to my true love after the great battle of Waterloo, I fell in with lively ones at the great city of Brussels, an' one was a swordsman that could do mighty wonders with a sword. Him an' me, when our money was gone, made company together. A' was a Prooshan, an' one of they that come to us at Waterloo. A' larned me sword-play, an' I were quick to learn an' soon as good as he. Us pleased the folk same like as I now will please ye. But a' was a sorry

villain, that Prooshan was. A' growed jealous o' me, an' us quarrelled, an' I beat un sore. A' swore vengeance on me, an' one night, in drink, a' came at me an' throwed that at me that blinded me; an' I caught un before a' could run, an' I ran sword through's body. My lassies an' lads, though blind I was, an' though blind I be, I still can do un yet. For lookee, lads an' lassies, my part in our sword-play was done blindfold, an' that which a' had learned me to do with cloth about my eyes, same as ever I could do with the darkness ever upon me. Ye shall see; ye shall see. Ring round me, lads an' lassies, an' see sword-play such as never ye see afore.'

"All on us ringed round un, sir, an' true it is never afore were such play seen with a sword. A' whirled his sword, an' a' twisted his sword, an' a' cut with his sword and thrust with his sword, till 'ee would ha' said the man stood within a maze of hoops of shining silver. Ou-ai, ou-ai, most marvellous it was to behold, to be sure. An' when a' was done with that, a' called for ribbons an' a' called for apples, an' a' throwed un aloft an' cut un as they fell in manner most astonishing to see. An' when a' was done with that a' called for bold uns to set apple on throat an' a' would sever un in halves, all blind as a' was, an' make never so much as a scratch on the throat that had the apple on un. We was main afeared at first for to let un try, but a' laughed so bold an' so mocking that first me an' then another an' then another come forward an' leaned us back on soles of our feet an' palms of our hands an'

stretched back our heads an' had apple cut in twain on our throats, and nary scratch nor touch.

"Ou-ai, 'twas wonderful, 'twas wonderful. Up 'ud go his sword high as a' could reach, an' down swift as a' could hit; an' all us 'ud hold our breaths for fear, an' the lassies scream, an' lo, there was the apple in twain on grass, an' he whose throat it had bin on laughing an' proud to ha' shown his courage. There was many hung back afeared till for shame of the lassies' eyes, an' for mocking of those that had come forward, they come out an' took their turn. An', lookee, sir, each one that came Corporal Harry would cry, 'Who be this?' an' us ud shout, 'Benjy Willcomequick,' or whosoever it might be; an' Corporal Harry would raise his sword an' say, 'A good stroke, then, for Benjy Willcomequick, an' a true stroke for un!' an' down his sword would come — swoo-oo-oop. Drab take these teeth o' mine.

"So it went on, sir. An' presently Harry says, 'Lo,' says he, 'all that I knew here an' that were playmates with me ha' come, but there be one that has not come, an' one I fain would come, for well I knew un an' many's the honest fun we've had together. 'Tis Willie Pringle, I mean. Is he not here?'

"An' the lads an' lassies laugh an' cry, 'He is here, Harry; he is here.'

"An' he cries, 'Ha! Right glad I am he be here. Good welcome to 'ee, Willie Pringle. Come forward, come forward. Show thou be'st not afeared of me, Willie Pringle. What cause hast thou to fear me, man?'

"Sir, they all turn to Willie Pringle for to pull un forward; an' Willie Pringle hung back an' said a' felt ill an' that the sun had bin too strong for un. A' hung back, an' truly ill a' looked, an' ghastly white, and the sweat running like water down his face. But they laughed at un an' called to un, an' for shame a' could not tarry, an' they pushed un forward, an' into the ring he comes, an' sets down on feet an' hands an' stretches out his throat, an' Harry, with never a word, puts apple on un.

"Ou-ai, but sick an' ghastly Willie Pringle looked, an' the sweat streaming down his face, an' him so shaking that twice the apple rolled from's throat an' fell, an' us shouts to Harry 'twas fallen, an' with never a word but only a smile Harry feels for apple on the grass an' sets it back again.

"Then all be fixed at last, an' Harry puts his sword aloft, an' says he, as he had said for t'others, 'Who be this?' an' they cry to un, 'Willie Pringle.' An' a' says, 'A good stroke, then, for Willie Pringle an' a true stroke for un!'

"An' a change comes in's voice, an' a' says in a loud crying voice, 'Untruly thou hast dealt by a maid, Willie Pringle, but truly will I deal with thee. Untruly thou hast robbed a maid of her virtue, an' untruly me of my love, but truly will I deal with thee.'

"An' a' takes his sword up higher yet. An' a most terrible silence an' a most terrible fear falls on all the company; an' I see man clutching man an' maid clutching maid; an' all would cry an' run to stop un, but none could move, so terrible did he look; an' I thought

to see Willie Pringle twist an' roll away, but a' was fixed there as though bound with iron bands, an' his eyes staring an' the sweat like water on un.

"An' Harry in a most terrible voice says, "Untruly thou hast taken a life, Willie Pringle, but truly a life thou shalt give."

"An' a' cries in a very loud voice, 'Ha!' an' down his sword come like lightning from above, an' through apple an' through throat an' through neck it goes, an' the head falls an' rolls; an' in the mist before my e'en, an' in the horror an' the dismay an' the confusion, I see Harry wipe his blade on grass an' sheathe his sword an' pass through the press an' walk away, none having wits nor courage to stop un."

THE GRIM TEST

THE GRIM TEST

I

She was made to be loved. In her face were red roses beneath cream roses; in her eyes were violets when the dew is on the violets and the sun is on the dew; in her voice (if you can understand this) was a June morning in the garden, when all the house except yourself is still asleep; in her laugh was a silver bell. Her name was Elsie; she was an orphan; she lived all alone; she worked very hard for a very poor living; her years were twenty-two. She was made to be loved; but she was twenty-two and somehow she never had been loved. It's a rum world.

Now come to James.

James, who had moderate wealth, considerable fame and numerous acquaintances, had also enormous loneliness. When, simultaneously, wealth and fame came to James (who, when he was pursuing it, had fondly imagined fame to be a milk-white doe that he would lead with a ribbon, but who, when come up with it, discovered it to be a lion that leapt about him roaring his name into the uttermost corners of the earth so that the earth shook, very greatly alarming and discomforting him), when wealth and fame in this guise came to James, James, to deal with the invitations and

the commissions that flowed upon him — James was a painter — found it convenient to employ a secretary; and what James — whose other name was Prince, James Prince — what James thought about his secretary was precisely what, in regard to his enormous loneliness, he felt about his friends and his books.

James, a painfully self-conscious man, suffered considerable embarrassment in dictating letters to this secretary of his and frequently when she had gone rewrote letters quite different from the letters he had dictated to her, and what James felt about her was this: he wished she could appear before him, as out of a trap-door, at any moment that he desired her to appear. This, as you can see for yourself, the secretary, with the best will in the world, could not possibly do; and the position between James and his secretary was this: invariably when James felt that he could dictate his correspondence with the ease and the fluency of a gramophone, his secretary, who came by appointment, was miles and hours beyond reach; and invariably when, by appointment, his secretary sat before him, the soul of James was abashed, the mind of James was confused and the tongue of James was tied in a double knot, *tight*. It was a great relief to James when his secretary finished and left; and though it was doubtless equally a relief to the secretary she, as James, left gloomily alone, gloomily reflected, was compensated by payment for her association with James, whereas James was not compensated by anything for his hours with his secretary, "or," as he would say glumly, "or with anybody else."

For, yes, precisely as the attitude of James towards his secretary was the attitude of James towards his friends and his books, his comforts, his recreations and everything that was his. In his loneliness, increasing it as dead sea fruit the pains of the thirsty, or as will-o'-wisp the perils of the lost, were moments when he yearned, most longingly, for some particular friend whose parts in his then particular mood exactly appealed to him, and invariably that friend was on those occasions hopelessly remote. Similarly, very fond as he was of reading, with his books. Enormous longing to read a particular book came invariably when leagues and hours separated him from that book. And, as with his secretary, there went with these contingencies their corollaries: when he was with his friends he did not want his friends and was not entertained by his friends, and when he was among his books he had no inclination to read his books.

An odd fellow, James.

"If I were the kind of person who says that kind of thing," James used to reflect, "I would say that nobody understands me. But I am not that kind of person. That kind of person is sorry for himself and feels that the blame for his plight rests on a world incapable of estimating him at his true worth. With me, not so. The world — apart from my painting, which it over-estimates — estimates me, personally, at my true worth, which is emptiness and futility; and I am not a bit sorry for myself, I am only very weary of myself and very dissatisfied with myself. I do not satisfy other people and that is why they do not satisfy me."

An introspective fellow, James.

"All the same —" said James, and sighed; and would wish for his secretary and she was not; and would wish for a particular friend and he was not; and would desire a particular book and it was not; and on an occasion following would have his secretary and would be tongue-tied; and would meet his friend and would find him not what he had imagined him to be; and would be among his books and would desire none of his books. "Why the dickens is it?" said James. "My fault, of course," said James.

"All the same —" said James, and groaned.

A lonely fellow, James.

But listen! When James thus said, "All the same —," and when James, saying it, thus groaned or sighed, invariably there took place within James a roving or questing of the spirit which was to James in his loneliness as was the roving or questing of the dove to Noah in his Ark. The dove roamed the face of the waters in search of dry land for Noah; and his spirit roamed the face of his imagination in search of satisfaction for James. Noah was at last rewarded by a symbol of hope in the beak of the dove; and James — this is the funny part of the thing — not at last, but always, was rewarded by a symbol of hope in the beak of his spirit. The daily life of James, searching, found never solid satisfaction on which his heart could rest and with which his loneliness could be filled; but the spirit of James, questing, returned ever with assurance that somewhere, somehow, with some one, there was, there *must* be——

"But where, but how, but whom?" said James. "Rum," said James. "Nothing matters to me. That's what the trouble is. Except my work, no thing and no person really and truly matters.

"All the same —," said James, and sighed.

A baffled fellow, James.

But attend! This "really and truly," with which James affirmed or emphasized the emptiness of his life was not a mere expression; it was a mark or signal of the profundity of the introspectiveness of James. James did not merely *think* that nothing and nobody mattered to him; James *knew* it; and he knew it by application (especially to persons) of a test which, in his introspectiveness, he had formulated unto himself, and whereby, introspecting, he tested the true depth of his affections.

This test was a grim, a harsh, almost a brutal test, and it was a test that few really nice people would, in the matter of their affections, care to employ.

The test employed by James was "I like So-and-so. I like So-and-so very much indeed. But how deeply does 'very much indeed' go? Would I care," (this was the test) "would I care, would I deeply and frightfully care, if So-and-so died?"

The answer invariably was that, deeply and frightfully, in the sense in which James meant deeply and frightfully, he would not care.

Let a specific example be given. In a period when miserably for some months he had lain in a nethermost pit of his loneliness, he one day perceived a rope stretched down to him and looking up beheld at the

other end of the rope a girl whom he knew well, met frequently and who, by the casting down to him of this rope, might reasonably be supposed to be, well, more than a little interested in him. "By golly!" cried James (or words to that effect) "By golly, I believe I could find in this girl all that for which my soul is anhungered. By golly, I believe I could! By golly, I will be in love with her!"

And with these words James clutched hold of the rope and, the girl immediately tautening it, suffered himself to be drawn up out of the pit.

All might have gone well and this story never have been written, but unfortunately, the pit being deep and James (a weighty-minded fellow) uncommonly heavy, considerable time was occupied in the hauling up of James; and in the middle of it, James, spinning at the end of the rope like a bale of goods at the end of a crane, applied to the kindly girl (pulling and hauling for all she was worth) the grim, the harsh, the almost brutal test hereinbefore scheduled and described.

"Am I in love with her?" propounded James to himself, spinning. "*I don't know.* Very well then, would I care if she died?"

Immediately the rope let him down with a run about six feet, and, "I would be sorry," said James hurriedly, "very, very sorry." The rope steadied again, so James repeated it: "Very, very sorry," repeated James.

"But would I care?" said James again presently, "really and truly care, as I cared, most poignantly,

when deaths occurred in my family circle? Would I care like that?"

The answer was flat. He would not care like that.

Very alarming tremors began to take place in the rope; but James, an introspective fellow, stubbornly pursued his introspection. "If I heard of her death," said James, "would I go without my meals? Would I be thrown out of the stride of my work at my easel? Would her death distaste for me one single spoonful of my dinner, or lose for me one single morning of my work?"

"No," said James, "it would not. Obviously, then, I am not in love with her. No."

Whereupon the rope broke and James with a sickening thud was returned to the bottom of the pit.

"Nothing matters to me," said James, bruised. "That's what it is with me: nothing really and truly matters. All the same —," said James, and sighed.

II

Now James, though he has been shown as declaring that nothing and nobody really and truly mattered to him, has also been reported as adding: "except my work." His work mattered very much to James, and, painting one day a picture in which ribbons were worn by one of his models, he must needs himself go to a ribbon shop to buy the ribbons. A painter to whom his work mattered less would have suffered the model to buy the ribbons. Not so James and not thus had moderate wealth and considerable fame come to James.

James, fuming at the interruption, but determined to have only the exact shades of ribbon that only himself could choose, went one day to the ribbon counter of this shop (one of those enormous emporiums that disdain to call themselves shops) and there fussed enough to drive a girl mad over choosing the ribbons that he desired. I should say that if he caused to be got down for him a yard of ribbon, he caused to be got down for him a mile, and I should say, and have already said, that he fussed, fumed and finicked enough to drive mad the girl who attended upon him.

Did it drive her mad? No. It did not in the least discompose or ruffle her. She was as sweet of disposition as she was lovely of countenance. She was Elsie.

Now then!

James at last concluded his purchases, realised that he had inordinately fussed over them, and a pleasant, courteous fellow when not at work or not in the depths of the pit where normally he lived, apologised for the inordinate fuss that he had made.

"I'm afraid I have been a most awful nuisance," said James.

"Oh, really, no," said Elsie.

"I have, though," said James, and looking at Elsie for the first time (as it were) saw that she was comely and stared upon her.

"You haven't indeed," declared Elsie.

"I have though," repeated James, staring.

"Oh, really, no," repeated Elsie, smiling. "Indeed not."

"I wanted the ribbons for a particular purpose," said James, staring.

"Oh, I could see that," said Elsie and tinkled ever so prettily the silver bell that was her laugh.

The tinkle of a bell naturally attracts the attention to the place of its tinkling, and the tinkling of this bell that was the laugh of Elsie attracted the attention of James to a new aspect of the comeliness of Elsie at which also James stared. The effect of this aspect upon the senses of James very much annoyed James. It discommoded or inhibited the articulatory processes of James and he found his tongue heavy within his mouth and incapable of speech.

James, therefore, very lamely, laughed.

"Ha, ha," laughed James, lamely; and his tongue being in no way loosened, but indeed heavier than before, proceeded lamely to remove himself.

"You've forgotten your parcel," cried Elsie.

"Good lord!" cried James; and James, recovering the parcel, and viewing the comeliness of Elsie as it were spread across the entire extent of the shop in a haze, mist or shimmer, in appalling confusion left the shop.

"Dash!" said James.

Four days after this day, the fourth day being the Sabbath, James, mounting to the outside of a motorbus, found but one seat vacant thereon and, seating himself on this seat, found that the passenger beside him was Elsie.

"Hull-o!" said James.

The red roses on the face of Elsie overcame and

spread above the cream roses and the cream roses dissolved or disappeared into the red roses.

"Hull-afternoon," said Elsie, crushing the spontaneity of "Hullo" beneath the decorum of "Good afternoon."

Fifteen minutes after this minute, the fifteenth minute being the seventeenth minute past four, post meridian, James discovered himself to be walking in Hyde Park with Elsie. "Discovered himself" is correct; for how or by what means or by what conversational stages he had been transferred from the bus beside Elsie to Hyde Park beside Elsie, James could not possibly have told. Recovering from the daze or fog in which these processes must have been conducted, and discovering himself pacing beside her, and realising, on making the discovery, how very astounding it was that he should be pacing beside her, "You know," said James, "this is a most extraordinary thing for me to be doing. I've never done a thing like this in my life before."

"Nor I," said Elsie. "Isn't it funny?"

"By Jove, it *is* funny," said James seriously.

A serious fellow, James.

These were, though James did not know it, almost the first words they had exchanged since entering the park, and in silence for rather more than a quarter of a mile they debated, in their several ways, the funniness on which they had found themselves in agreement.

"But you said," then said James, taking up the conversation although the last of it was more than a quarter of a mile behind them, "but you said that

you walk here every Sunday and every Saturday afternoon?"

"Yes, but by myself," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

Three hundred and thirty-two yards farther, "Not with any one," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

These "Ah's" of James were uttered very profoundly and weightily and were intended by James to be charged with enormous meaning, as indeed they must have been, for James, in this most remarkable situation in which he found himself, was thinking enormously and "Ah," pronounced at long intervals, was almost the sole articulation by which James, throughout the afternoon, discharged or relieved the accumulation of thoughts thus amassed. Nor were the contributions of Elsie to the debate of much greater dimension. The whole conversation between James and Elsie during their solemn circumnavigation of the park, including their farewell at its termination and the suggestion of James, approved by Elsie, that the circumnavigation might be repeated on the following Saturday afternoon, could have been written on a half-sheet of notepaper. Neither, it will be remembered, had ever done this kind of thing before and each, it surely follows, did it for the first time very slowly and awkwardly.

Especially James.

They did it, however, a second, third, fourth and fifth time with a loquacity but little increased; but the very curious thing is that the less they talked and the more they walked the more were their meetings

looked forward to by James, and the more soothed, refreshed, healed and elevated was the soul brought away and returned to his home by James.

This, though it immensely comforted James, profoundly puzzled James.

"It isn't as though," reflected James, "we ever said a thing. What the dickens can it be, then?"

A newly baffled fellow, James.

"I hope you don't mind my not talking?" said James, in the course of one walking, to Elsie.

"Not a bit," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

And on the occasion of the next walking, "As I was saying about not talking," said James; "it's like this with me. I like being with you, in fact I seem to like it better than anything I know. But what I like is just being with you and feeling I needn't talk, and that you don't mind if I don't talk. Always when I'm with anyone I feel that I've got to talk, and I never can talk, and the thing is simply an agony to me. It's difficult to understand, and I never can make any one understand it. I do hope," concluded James, exhausted, "that *you* understand?"

"I understand perfectly," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

And, returning home that night, "That girl understands me," said James.

This solved for James the puzzlement of James.

It also opened for James two fields, the one of speculation, the other of experimentation, in each of which James very interestedly browsed.

In the first field, that of speculation, the herbage upon which James browsed or speculated was of the following kind. "This girl," reflected James, browsing, "delights my eye and soothes, pleases, comforts and altogether satisfies my mind. Much more than all this, she understands me. Am I," inquired of himself James, "in love with her?"

"Well, there's only one way," said James, "of deciding that"; and he reached out for his test and applied it.

"Would I care," said James, applying his test, "really and truly and deeply and poignantly care, if she died? If I went to the park to-morrow and learnt that she was dead and that I never again should see her, I should be sorry; yes, by Jove, I would indeed be most frightfully sorry, but would I, would I go without my meals, would I chuck my work, would I feel that for me the end of the world had come and that I desired never again to eat, to work, or take my sleep? Now then, *would* I?"

"No," said James. "I would not."

"Obviously," said James, "I am not in love with her."

"Dash it!" said James, and came out of the field of speculation and turned him into the field whose herbage was experimentation.

Here James browsed very strangely indeed. "I am not in love," browsed James, "and it is quite clear to me that at this rate I never shall be in love. This," browsed James, "is very grievous to me. It is very grievous to me because it denies me a bliss which I can

most ardently imagine but which, because I cannot really and truly love, I can by no means, curse me, contrive.

"But can I," browsed James, "by no means contrive it? I imagine subjects for my paintings and these, on my canvases, I contrive; why, imagining the bliss of love, should not I by artifice contrive it? The reason," browsed James, "is because, whereas in my painting the creatures of my imagination understand me and gladly suffer me to work upon them my artifice, in this matter of imagining myself in love there is required a living personage who could not possibly understand me and could not, therefore —

"But wait," browsed James. "Elsie, who delights my eye and satisfies my mind, *does* understand me. Now, if I were to explain to her — By golly," said James, and lifted his head from his browsing and fixed his eye meditatively upon the horizon and reflectively chewed the cud, "By golly," said James, "I believe she *would* understand. . . ."

Now watch James.

James, in all this time, had never communicated to Elsie his any other name than James, nor communicated to her any fact of or pertaining to his mode of life, his place in the scheme of society or the means by which he earned unto himself his daily bread; nor (and this is perhaps even more remarkable) had he associated with her anywhere but in the park, or vouchsafed unto her any entertainment such as a theatre or any refreshment such as a box of chocolates or a cup of tea. It was the unique charm (to James) of Elsie that she was

perfectly content (as was he sublimely content) merely to meet him and to pace with him in, for the most part, silence.

Now, however, coming to her on a day following his browsing in the field of experimentation, James, in order to propound unto her his experiment, opened a first stage of it by addressing to her the following words.

"There's a thing that I've been thinking about," said James, "and it is that I believe — I've never been about like this with any one before so I don't know, but, as I say, I believe — I believe we ought to go and have some tea somewhere together. Oughtn't we?"

"Oh, I'd love to," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James; and not more than two hundred yards further on sought her help in the new and unforeseen difficulties by this "Ah" expressed.

"Where?" said James.

"Well, where?" said Elsie.

Beginning with the Ritz and descending by stages to a coffee-stall known unto him in Camden Town, there passed through the imagination of James about two dozen houses of refreshment, but in none of them could James, unaccustomed to this kind of thing, imagine himself with Elsie. Ten minutes having passed in this desolating review, "I tell you what wouldn't be bad," said James, "I've got the run of a man's studio not far from here where sometimes I go for tea, and where they give you not half a bad tea. What about that?"

"Oh, that would be lovely." said Elsie. "Would he mind though, your friend?"

"Not a bit," said James, and they proceeded silent through the park to the main road, and thence to the house of James and to the studio attached to the house of James.

With his key James opened the private door of the studio and, as was to be expected, for it was a very comfortably furnished and tastefully appointed studio, Elsie expressed herself as enraptured with it.

"Oh, it's lovely!" cried Elsie, "it's perfectly adorable; I've never imagined such a place!"

"Not bad," said James.

"And are those," cried Elsie, looking round, "your friend's pictures?" She moved, obviously entranced, from canvas to canvas, some propped against the walls, some hanging, one or two on easels. "Why, they're wonderful, they're wonderful!" she cried.

"Not bad," said James, fidgeting. He had overlooked, in inviting Elsie to the studio, the possibilities now afoot, and the possibilities now afoot disquieted him and alarmed him.

Elsie from the end of the studio turned very slowly towards James. She had taken root before a very large painting in a very noble frame, and she turned towards James as though she turned with difficulty on the root that she had taken. "Is *that* one of your friend's pictures?" asked Elsie.

"I think so," said James, "I believe so. Oh, yes, it would be."

"Why, I saw it when it was on exhibition!" said

Elsie. "I saw it three times. I would have seen it three hundred, if I could have afforded it. Is your friend James Prince, *the* James Prince?"

This enormously discomfited James.

"Eh?" said James.

"*The* James Prince?" said Elsie.

At that moment there entered the studio a manservant bearing upon a silver tray the materials of a singularly delectable tea.

"Ah, here's the tea!" cried James, relieved; and, fussing with the teapot, "I believe," said James, "that *is* his name. Get out!" said James (this was in a hoarse whisper to the manservant, who, accustomed to James, got out).

"You *believe* it is?" cried Elsie, gazing in great amazement at the richness and prodigality of the tea-tray, but regarding with much greater amazement the discovery which now, to the great embarrassment of James, she desired James to elucidate. "You *believe* it is? But you must *know*."

"Well, as a matter of fact, it *is*," said James. "Yes, he is James Prince. At least that's his *name*," said James, as if casting doubt either on the right of the personality to the name or on the right of the name to the personality.

Elsie, however, to the chagrin of James, paid no attention to this sinister and mysterious inflexion. "But I think he is perfectly glorious!" cried Elsie.

"Do you?" said James, pleased.

"I think he is the most glorious painter that ever lived!" said Elsie.

"Oh, I shouldn't say that," said James deprecatingly.

"But I do!" cried Elsie. "I've got a print of that picture hanging on my wall, and it's so wonderful to me that I can't bear to have any other pictures beside it, so I took them all down."

"Oh, you shouldn't have done that," said James.

"I had to," cried Elsie. "But you *know* him? You mean to say he is a friend of yours! I can't believe it."

An enormous effort was made by James to extricate himself from the terrible and unforeseen depths in which he found himself plunged. "*Don't* believe it," said James, making the enormous effort. "Look here, the fact of the matter is, I've rather led you astray over this business. This chap Prince isn't exactly a friend of mine. No, I can't possibly call him a friend" (which, having regard to his normal disgruntlement with his own personality, James indeed could not do).

"But he lets you come as you like into his studio," persisted Elsie, "and have tea, and all that. Why he *must* be your friend!"

"The fact of it is," said James, desperately searching for some fiction that could be presented as fact, "the fact of it is that I — I help him."

"Then are you," cried Elsie, "are you a painter?"

James, like a bolted rabbit in a net making futile bounds where no bounds were to be made, made a futile bound. "Not *that* kind of painter," said James.

"But you paint pictures?"

"Railings," said James, firmly, "railings and houses."

It was exactly characteristic of the charm of Elsie

in the mind of James that this statement, though conceivably a disappointment to Elsie, appeared not in the least to diminish the pleasure that Elsie seemed to find in the company of James.

"Really?" said Elsie.

"Absolutely," said James.

"Well, that's quite all right," said Elsie, "and awfully nice. There's no one I love to see at work more than painters, brightening up places as they do. But, if you paint railings and that, I don't see what sort of help you can be to a man like James Prince."

James, to his great relief, was here able to set his feet on firm and true ground. If there were one supreme law in the studio of James, it was that none other than James was permitted to touch the painting materials of James. "I wash his brushes for him," said James, "and clean his palettes, and all that sort of thing."

"*I see*," said Elsie, and nodded and snuggled herself into a great armchair and bit largely with perfect teeth into a golden muffin.

James, at these words and particularly at the tone of the words, as also at the nod, the snuggling and the bite, was ravished.

"This girl," said James to himself, ravished, "understands me. All the same," said James to himself, "if she were to die in that very chair —"

And a sigh was sighed by James.

Elsie set down the cup she had raised and gazed very beautifully at James. "You're not unhappy, are you?" said Elsie.

"Oh, no," said James, but hopelessly.

"But you sighed?"

"Oh, I just sighed," said James.

"I believe I know why you sighed," said Elsie.

James sat up to full attention. "My goodness, I hope you don't," cried James; and he hoped it, as may be conjectured, very sincerely.

"I think you sighed," said Elsie, speaking with what sounded to the ears of James as an exquisite softness, "at the sight of all this wealth," she indicated with what was considered by James an exquisite gesture the sumptuous apartment in which they sat, "of all this comfort. You shouldn't," said Elsie; "you needn't."

"That's true," said James.

"Of course it is," said Elsie brightly. "Money doesn't necessarily mean happiness."

"I believe you," said James, which he did; and he then said, "What's your idea of happiness?"

The red roses among the cream roses very slightly deepened. "I couldn't tell you that," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

A considerable silence followed this; then, "But I should like to know," said James.

The red roses engulfed the cream roses. "I couldn't," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

In a tender voice, "Of course," said Elsie, "if you are poor like we are — you don't get paid very well for painting railings, do you?"

"I get practically nothing," said James with great truth, "for painting railings."

"I thought not," said Elsie. "Of course if you are poor like we are it would undoubtedly be most awfully nice to be rich."

"Ah," said James.

Of all the "Ah's" ever uttered by James, and they were many, no Ah was charged with such profundity of thought as this Ah. James, by the words to which this Ah responded, was given a footing from the first stage of his experiment (namely the entertainment of Elsie to tea) to the second stage of his experiment, namely the introduction of the experiment to Elsie; and the Ah was the heavy and purposeful tread with which James trod from the one stage to the other stage.

"Ah," said James again. "Look here, I tell you what. Let's *pretend* that we are rich. Let's pretend that we are here because all this belongs to us."

"Oh, let's!" cried Elsie.

"Good," said James, pleased to find — as yet — no signs of wobbling on the second stage. "Do you mind," said James, testing for any as yet undeveloped wobbling, "do you mind pretending it in my way?"

"Not a bit!" cried Elsie. "Of course in your way. What is your way?"

"Well, my way," said James — "you've probably seen by now that I'm a quiet sort of chap who likes things in a quiet sort of way — my way of pretending all this belongs to us is not to sit up and gas about it and say how nice it is, but just to sit here and munch our tea and warm our toes and, without saying anything, just imagine that it is ours and that there's no excitement about it because it simply *is* ours."

"Sort of sit and dream it?" asked Elsie.

"Absolutely," said James; and added apologetically, "It's just my way, you know."

"You know, I believe I understand your ways," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

For a quarter of an hour in silence this dream — that all this belonged to *them* — was enormously enjoyed by James. Then said James, "There's just one thing —"

He stopped. He had raised his eyes from the fire whereon blissfully they had rested, and what he saw upon the face of Elsie very much astonished him. She was lying back in her deep armchair; her eyes were closed and there was, immediately about and beneath her eyelashes — her remarkably long eyelashes — a dampness, a welling of moisture, in fact a tear.

"I say," said James, astonished, "you're not crying, are you?"

Elsie sat up quickly. "Good gracious, no!" cried Elsie. She applied to each eye a handkerchief, the dimensions of which appeared to James insufficient for the absorption of more than a single tear, and blinked and smiled at James, "I expect it's the fire," said Elsie.

"It doesn't do that to my eyes," said James.

"It does to mine," said Elsie. "I've noticed it."

"Ah," said James.

"All the same," said Elsie, "if I had been crying, in fact perhaps in a way I was, it would have been" — there occurred in her voice the very tiniest catch or

break — “it would have been crying with happiness.”

“With happiness?” questioned James.

“Oh, happiness,” affirmed Elsie. “You’ve no idea how I’m simply loving this — this imagining.”

“*Are* you?” said James.

A small sigh was sighed by Elsie and a new snuggle was snuggled by Elsie. “Oh, loving it!” she sighed.

Then spake James robustly.

“I’m not,” said James.

“You’re not!” cried Elsie, exquisite concern of her voice most exquisitely matching the lovely concern of her face. “Oh, I am sorry. Oh, do tell me why.”

“I’m going to,” said James. “I’m imagining that all this belongs to us and it’s the happiest feeling I’ve had in months, in years. But what I want also to imagine in order to complete the happiness, is that as all this belongs to us so each of us belongs to the other. I want to imagine that you belong to me and that I belong to you. Do you mind if I imagine that?”

“Not a bit!” said Elsie quite simply.

“Thanks most awfully,” said James. “Absolutely imaginary, of course; not in the least real.”

“Oh, absolutely,” said Elsie.

“In fact *you* needn’t imagine it at all, if you don’t like,” said James.

“Oh, I quite see that,” said Elsie.

“Well, that’s simply splendid,” said James, extending his legs to the fire and inclining his back to the cushions. “Rum idea of mine, I’m afraid.”

“Not a bit,” said Elsie.

“Just my way, you know,” said James.

"I do believe I perfectly understand your ways," said Elsie.

"Ah," said James.

There passed then for James, or rather in the imagination of James, which was the quality of James by far the most highly developed, incomparably the happiest half-hour that James had ever passed. He watched, as he reclined, the lovely creature who sat over against him, and in his imagination he bathed in the lovely thought that she belonged to him and he to her, and that equally to the twain of them belonged everything that he possessed. This, for ages as it seemed to James, had been the yearning desire of his life; it never could be fulfilled because always it was denied him by the test which proved to him that no person and no thing (except his work) ever really mattered to him; lo! by the beautiful understanding of Elsie it was, in his imagination, fulfilled, pressed down and running over. James *was* happy.

The half-hour passed; the time arrived (Elsie said) for her to go. Now propounded James the experiment to which all this, though blissful, had but been the trial or induction.

James having stated for his part, and Elsie having agreed for her part, that the afternoon had been the most blissful ever known, "Now," propounded James, "I want to suggest to you something like this that we have been enjoying only more so. Very much more so," said James.

"Oh yes," said Elsie.

"You'll think me rum," said James, "and unques-

tionably I am rum, or rather, as I call it, and as undoubtedly it is, hopelessly unsatisfactory. But what I want most awfully is to be in love."

"Oh yes," said Elsie.

"And the dickens, the extraordinary dickens of it is," said James, "that I can't get in love."

"I see," said Elsie.

(She said it so beautifully, so simply, and so understandingly, that "No girl like this has ever before been created," reflected James. "All the same —" reflected James, and inwardly sighed.)

"Well, the only thing I can do," continued James, "is to be in love by imagination."

"I see," said Elsie.

"Splendid!" said James, and further continued. "Now this afternoon, thanks to your most awfully decent understanding, I have been by imagination in love and absolutely heavenly it's been. But — this is the point — only passively in love. Now what I want most awfully is to be actively in love; not only, that is to say, to *be* in love, but to make love."

"I see," said Elsie.

"By Jove, you're simply wonderful," said James, "you really are. Well, will you then," continued James, "permit me for a whole day — I thought one Sunday away by the sea somewhere for the day — to make love to you?"

Elsie turned her head away for a moment (to look at something I suppose: I am sorry only to be able to tell this story through the personality of James) and then turned it back and nodded it.

"You're marvellous," said James, "you really are. By golly, we'll do it then. Next Sunday?"

More nods.

"Yes, marvellous," said James; "the most wonderful creature that ever was created."

Some practical discussion followed, as to the Somewhere-by-the-Sea where the day should be spent, and as to the ability of James, on a painter's wages, to afford the excursion ("I shall draw five pounds out of the Savings Bank," said James. "I've wanted this for years and years, and now it's actually come I don't see why I shouldn't spend some money on myself for once and do the thing properly") and then James, with last words, separated from Elsie.

"What do you suppose," inquired James, opening the last words, "your attitude will be? I mean to say, shall you pretend, imagine, that you are in love with me?"

Elsie, as before and no doubt for the same reason, averted her head for a moment and then returning it stated that she thought perhaps she had better. "It would make it more real for you, wouldn't it?" said Elsie.

"It most certainly would," said James.

"Well, I will, then," said Elsie.

"You *are* a splendid creature!" said James.

"Not a bit," said Elsie. "I think I'll go now," and she went, rather suddenly.

Warning is now given that, in half a minute, the story takes a turn deeply serious.

III

"Now," said James, as, Sunday arrived, the train began to move, "before we begin, let's just run over this and see that we know exactly where we are." (They were in a first-class carriage which James, secretly, had reserved, but James meant more than that.) "Where we are is that we're just engaged and this is our first day alone together since our engagement, and we simply — we simply *love*. But it's absolutely understood between us that in actual fact we don't love at all, not a bit, and that the whole thing is simply pretending. It's all to seem real, perfectly, wonderfully real, but really it isn't real at all. That all right?"

"Quite," said Elsie softly.

"I say," said James noticing the softness, "you're rather quiet this morning, aren't you? Not feeling rotten or anything, are you?"

Elsie looked out of the window. "No," said Elsie, looking out.

"Good," said James. "Well, I vote we start then, shall we?"

She gave, her head averted yet, a sound that seemed to be of agreement.

"Do you mind," said James, "if I put my arm around you?"

She gave again that sound.

James put his arm about her. "I rather think," said James, "it's the kind of thing one would do, in the circumstances."

Her body within his arm was stiff and did not yield. She said, and her voice was as if her throat required to be cleared, "It's not real, is it?"

"Absolutely not," said James.

She suddenly yielded her body to James and she was completely within the embrace of James and her head was on his shoulder and her eyes were upturned to him. "That's all right then," she said, and she seemed to James yet a degree more to yield to him within his arm and she closed her eyes and there was some glistening stuff upon her lashes, and she yielded to him yet a further degree.

"I say, this is jolly fine, you know," said James.

She sighed.

"Now if you don't mind, I'm going to start," said James.

She opened her eyes and spoke to him. "Before you start" — her voice had always been singularly beautiful to James, but it had now a note that was entirely new and infinitely more beautiful, a note very full yet very low — "Before you start," she said, "there's one thing I'd like you to know because I think it will make your imagining all the more real to you. It's this; that if you for ever so long have wanted to be in love, to make love to some one, oh, so have I, all my life, wanted to be loved!"

"By golly," said James, "have you though?"

"Oh, most frightfully! Oh, just as you, you're a man, have wanted to make love, so I, I'm a woman, have wanted, oh wanted, to be loved."

"My goodness!" said James.

"Oh, wanted to be! So you see, what I wanted to tell you is this; that you needn't think, and so perhaps out of consideration for me lose some of your happiness in this, you needn't think I'm not enjoying this pretending just as much as you. I am. Oh, just as much. You wanted it and you asked me to help and it just happened that I wanted it too, most frightfully."

"By Jove," said James, "that *is* funny."

"I thought it would make it better for you to know that."

"It does," said James. "By Jove, now I *can* start."

James then started.

Now the story takes that turn, deeply serious, of which warning has been given.

The day spent at Somewhere-by-Sea by James and Elsie is perfectly described by a single word: blissful. Blissful is the word for it because it was done to pattern and the pattern was the blissful pattern as definitely dedicated to lovers as is the path from the altar to the church door. The sun shone and the birds sang and the waves murmured; and first the two strolled hand in hand (when unperceived) along the downs above the sea; and then lay down upon the cliffs; and then were hungry; and then had lunch; and then were hand in hand again; and then had tea; and then again were strolling; oh, patterned way! Oh, blissful pattern!

They didn't — as it turned out — talk love. James simply imagined that he was in love with Elsie and he knew (because she told him so) that in the imagination of Elsie he was loved by Elsie, and all he had to do,

and all he did do, was to keep on imagining it and luxuriating in it. As to talking love, there was made indeed by James the discovery that for the expression of the state of being in love, of loving, there are but three words. That the whole range and compass of the native tongue suffers but three words to the expression of that but for which the entire race, and language with it, would perish and disappear, is a profound and moving thought; and James, thinking it, profoundly was moved by it and communicated it to Elsie. "And that being so," said James, "I think I had better say the three words, if you don't mind"; and said them.

"Now you," said James. "Not if you'd rather not, of course; but I think you'd better."

She asked him gently: "It isn't real?"

"Absolutely not," said James.

She told him, scarcely to be heard, "I love you."

"This is lovely," said James.

She echoed "Lovely."

Echo! No, not the echo's note was in her voice; rather the stir that through the perfect silence of a forest sometimes moves; something as strange as that, something akin as that to a volition mysterious, intangible, not to be perceived. He noticed it whenever "It isn't real?" she asked. "It isn't real?" when he had gone to place his arm about her; "It isn't real?" when she must hear, and then must say, the words of love; "It isn't real?" when on the cliffs he had suggested holding hands; "It isn't real?" when ——

This was when remained to them a final hour before the road to the station must be taken. Night owned the

hour and hung out all her lamps to jewel it for them. They were upon the beach, seated with backs against the cliff, and with the sea, returning night her lamps, at melody before them. They had been thus two hours, both of dusk. They hadn't spoken much.

Night drew the hour on the chain that she had had from day and passed to day, thence to eternity. James stirred and stretched his wrist out from his cuff and saw his watch; his other hand held both of Elsie's hands.

"We'll have to move," said James.

She did not answer.

"There's a last thing," said James. "I rather think it's the most important thing of all. We've done this business so frightfully well that I rather think we oughtn't to leave it out. I mean for me to kiss you."

She did not answer.

"Of course, if you think it's going a bit too far —" said James.

He thought he felt her shiver. "Not cold are you?" said James. "We'll be walking in a minute. Well, what about this kissing idea?" He took his hand from her hands and put his arm about her. "I do hope you aren't cold," he said.

Her voice, scarcely to be heard, was just heard by James, "If it is what you'd like."

"Well, I certainly would," said James. He bent his head to hers. "I must say it's most awfully nice of you."

But for his face so close to hers he had not heard her, "It isn't real?"

"Not a bit," said James.

She turned her face to his; to hers his lips descended. She breathed, "Oh, is this real?"

His eyes and just the slightest movement of his head assured her no. She closed her eyes. He kissed her.

After quite a little while, "By Jove, it wanted that," said James; and after yet a little while, "Well, well!" said James, and drew his arm from round her and got upon his feet and stretched himself and looked upon the sea; and it occurred to James, looking upon the sea, stretching himself, that the sea had ——; and upon this thought James turned his head between his stretching arms and looked towards the way that they had come here; and James, looking, very slowly relaxed his arms and rather strangely said, "I say — !" and turned and took some hurried steps along the way that they had come.

The cliff turned seawards at the point where James concluded his steps, and James, seeing what he saw, and for a rather dreadful moment gazing upon it, then retraced his steps and went past Elsie and very hurriedly along until, which was a distance very brief, he could again no farther go. Here also James saw what at the other extremity of his paces he had seen.

Alarm sprang from her couch within the citadel of James, and ran with frightening feet upon the flesh of James, and flew her pallid signal in the cheek of James, and on the drums of all his pulses drummed a roll.

His thought was "Elsie!"

He went back to her. She was not sitting as he had left her; she was lying upon the shingle, one arm out-

stretched, her face turned down upon it. There was an extraordinary desolation in her pose.

He had intended to say, "I say, we're cut off. I believe we're cut off!"

Those were the words he had shaped for her; but immediately upon his realisation of her peril, there was a swift and terrible thought of her that swept away those words. This was the thought: It was in dreadful possibility she was to die!

In hours drawn away upon time's chain beyond recall he had imagined, as his test, his feelings were death to take her; and his feelings had nothing responded to the test. Not imagination but death's self now set her death before him; and there was a strange and an enormous poignancy that flooded him and swept away from him the words he would have spoken; and the words he said, returned to her where she lay and standing over her, were her name, poignantly cried:

"Elsie! Elsie!"

He went on his knees and he touched her; and he had a sense as of enormous power in his body; and of his power a compulsion, as it were an instinct whose authority until it should be fulfilled was a torment, to draw her within the power that was his and there encompass her against the dissolution that was advancing upon her.

There was a sovereignty in his arms; and as his arms commanded her and turned her face to his, they must have communicated to her the sovereignty that was theirs. She said, "Oh, is this real?"

He drew her to his breast. "Real, real, my own, my darling!"

* * * * *

Soon — but a long time lived between — they were upon the final margin of the shore, their backs against the cliff. He had examined every prospect of escape, of bringing rescue, and there was no avail. He turned and a last time scanned the precipitous wall against which they stood. To a point beyond their efforts it ran up sheer; above that point, but just too far above, it sloped away, climbing in wooded banks. Along its face, almost as high as he could reach, there showed the line that was high-water mark.

He said to her, "When the time comes, I will take you in my arms, and as long as I can, I will hold you as high as I can."

She said, "When the time comes, dear, just hold me face to face."

The ripple of a wave ran thinly to them, and spread about his shoes. At its advance he caught her up, and with a little laugh said, "Not to let your darling feet get wet!"

Soon, "Are you afraid?" he said.

She had her arms about his neck, "Not afraid. Do you remember what I told you in the train that all my life I've wanted to be loved before I die? Tell me again I am."

He told her.

She said, "Afraid? Oh, happy!"

"There, I am holding you," he said, "your lovely and beloved face to mine."

She sighed. "Oh, say again it's real!"

"Real into what awaits us; real beyond."

She murmured, "Happy!"

* * * *

A very amazing thing was suddenly observed by James. There appeared to him to be quite close to him, where still the shingle only at intervals was covered by advancing ripples, a young man and a young woman. James stared. Hallucination? Spirits? Not spirits. The young man was smoking. *Smoking!*

"What the devil," cried James, amazed, "are you doing here?"

"Does the place," demanded the young man truculently, "belong to you?"

The truculence yet further astounded James. "Are you," demanded James, "cut off too?"

"Cut off!" said the young man. "Cut off what?"

James set down Elsie. "Aren't we cut off by the tide? Do you mean to say," said James, stupefied, "that we aren't cut off by the tide?"

The young man who in the vision of his appearance had his arm about his young woman companion, and in the vision of his truculence had dropped it, now replaced his arm and with his companion began to turn away. "You jolly soon will be," said the young man indifferently, "if you propose to stay here much longer."

Chilly and sarcastic on the part of the young man, stupefied on the part of James, a brief dialogue ensued. Where the cliff sloped gradual and wooded there was, said the young man, an easy pathway down its face; smugglers had made and used it. Where the cliff

became sheer and of rock, the smugglers had tunneled down to emerge on the shingle in a narrow opening ('Smugglers' Hole," said the young man), that stood behind a towering pillar of rock just at the cliff's turn. "Smugglers' Finger," said the young man, beginning to squeeze himself, as his companion had already squeezed herself, behind it.

"But I didn't think it was any good squeezing behind that!" said James.

"You wouldn't," said the young man, squeezing, "unless you knew"; and squeezed finally, and disappeared.

"Well!" said James.

He often wondered, afterwards, why, by reaction, they did not go off into helpless laughter. Much differently, it was with no more said they left the place; in silence took the upward path, and reached the level brow. There was a steep step for the final pace. James took it first and turned and stretched his hands to Elsie. "I sha'n't feel," he said, "it ever really happened until we're side by side up here."

He helped her up; and as their hands joined and as he took her weight, "It's all right," he said; "forget it; it wasn't real"; and he drew her to his level; and he continued the motion of his arms and brought her to his heart; and she caught her breath; and she said, "Oh, is this real?" and she was enfolded to his heart and he said, "Real, real, for ever!"

A MAGDALEN OF THE SOIL

A MAGDALEN OF THE SOIL

The kindest thing said of her, or should one say the thing the least unkind? was that she was deficient. Her fellows of her village (of the Nord) had for her other terms; deficient was the curé's estimate — said of her when news came of her during her considerable absence from those parts, but noted in her by him very much earlier in her life. Looking back, he saw that when she was a child, twelve, thirteen, as early as that, he had seen signs of it; when a young woman, sixteen and upwards to nineteen (her age when she left the village), had definitely suspected it.

Deficient. Not deficiency in wits was meant; she was of a slow, not a vivacious, habit of mind, but in no degree short of intelligence; nor yet, most certainly, deficiency physical: she was great-limbed and strangely beautiful; nor even deficient in a general moral sense: did not lie nor steal, was kind and honest. No, she was deficient (if the charity of the curé is to be adopted) solely in her sense of virtue. She simply did not have that sense. It was not to be appealed to in her because it was not there. When she was made she was made gloriously without but within was left — deficient. She did not seem to understand. The curé, in her earlier years, pleaded with her; her mother chided her; her father beat her; the neighbours ostra-

cized her. It went for nothing with her. The avail of it all was as the avail, with like intent, of beseeching, upbraiding, beating, segregating an animal. She did not understand. She was deficient.

When she was nineteen, working then as she had worked since she was ten, on her father's fields, an artist came to that village and painted her. He painted her because she was glorious and wonderful, and he painted her in that setting to which the glory of her beauty and the wonder of her stature belonged.

She belonged to the soil.

He came on her in the corner of a ploughed field adjoining the road on which he walked. She had a heavy cart there, a huge farm horse between the shafts, and she was upright on the cart unloading from it the steamy stable bedding that was its burthen. She used a pitchfork, a long ash pole headed with a double prong of steel; and that artist thought she made, standing aloft there and wielding her fork — immensely stabbing, enormously raising, ponderously casting — the spectacle the most superbly statuesque of poise, rhythmical of movement, that ever he had known the human form assume. And what a form! "Amazon" was first to his mind, a woman thighed and shouldered for a warrior's part; and Amazon was she. Then "Goddess" thought he, a statue deeply breasted, benign of countenance, kind, mild, serenely browed; and goddess-like she was.

A misty rain was falling. It had vexed that artist, and disliking to be wet he was hurrying, when he came upon her, homeward bound to the cottage where for

his painting expedition he had found a room. She worked amidst that rain as if not conscious of it, as if impervious to it. She wore to her knees a smock, belted with a strap, much as in England in the war days the land-girls wore; breeches just as were worn by them; and high, stout boots that we called trench boots. She had no hat. Her hair was jewelled by the rain in points of light, and crescent on her brow the like stars stood; her diadem, her coronet, that artist thought. The mist of rain, blurring the further prospects, was like, he thought, some special element only through which (as shapes beheld in clouds from magic potions) she was revealed.

She looked up and saw him and she smiled at him.

Her smile was slow. There was in it — as of her deficiency there might have been — no wanton trace, nothing of cunning, nothing bold. It was a smile serene, benign; goddess to mortal; mother to offspring; the tender, gentle smile that first from Eve in Eden announced, not sex to sex, but oneness of humanity, kinship of pain and joy beneath a common yoke, the fellowship of man. It was surprising in her, that slow, tender smile, when — as then — in arduous occupation in rough toil; but that artist came to know it suitable to her, characteristic of her slow, deliberate ways, when she was not at work. There was in particular another time he saw her — as often in those parts she was to be seen: walking upon the road alone (who would walk with her?); smocked, booted, breeched; her pitchfork on her shoulder, always held high, be it pitchfork, spade or mattock; her strong

hand, holding it, close against her breast; her other arm pendant, never swinging; her serene countenance uplifted, her mild eyes steadily before her, her pace slow as a labouring man's, but her knees, unlike the labouring man, braced at each impulse; her body, unlike theirs, erect, straight as a tree. "I saw men as trees walking" then had been that artist's thought; but of her holland smock, the fairness of her hue, tinted in bronze, and of her flaxen hair uncovered, a golden tree, he thought.

Her smile could be imagined then.

Now, as towards him from her cart she smiled, she spoke no word; resumed her heavy task; smiled twice or thrice again; once for a breathing space leaned on her fork regarding him, and all her thoughts (he felt) equally with her slow smile benign.

When the cart was empty, the manure a steaming pile where she had thrown it, she poised herself, negligently, superbly, and launched the fork upright into the ground a dozen yards away. A javelin, that artist thought, sped by Diana's hand. She took then a shovel—that long-handled scoop used of the French—scraped the cart roughly clean, descended, took the great horse by its bridle, and with cries in a voice strangely high and clear (deep, from that fine frame, he would have expected it) and with powerful impulses of her strong arm, drew the huge beast in a half-circle towards a pile of heavy roots; then, masterfully directing its massive movements, forced it to back the cart against the mound. She resumed then the spade and now that artist saw her in the splendid motions of

stooping to thrust her scoop beneath the clumsy roots, raising it ladened, swinging it mightily, discharging with perfect aim to make a level load within the cart, returning at the stroke's end to stoop and thrust and raise and swing and shoot again.

It was finished. She tossed the spade, easily as she had launched the fork, upon her load. She put her hands upon her loins and stretched her back against the downward tension of her stooping and gave a sound laughingly expressive of the twinge it caused her; recovered her poise, laughed towards that artist, tossed up her arms and stretched her limbs, a splendid sight, and laughed at him again. She caught then her horse's bridle and urged it to the collar. The wheels, heavily burthened, were sunk in the soft ploughed soil. Tremendously the great horse strove, its quarters braced, muscles and tendons like bars and rods of steel, hoofs, deeply buried, thrusting like ploughs within their pits; its forelegs in enormous grapplings rending and spurning up the soil; and all its massy, straining bulk breaking between the shafts to this side and to that as immensely it strove to burst away the hold that locked the wheels. To one not versed, or weak, there had been peril in those trampling hoofs, in that swaying mass, in that great head churning upon its iron neck the air. She had no danger thence. She was the master and director of this power here. That artist saw her strong and practised arm forbid the tossing head and hold it down as gives the stronger pull; and heard her cries, in that clear voice, of her encouragement; then saw her leave the bridle and with both hands along a shaft brace

in the ground her feet and, her bent back to him, cry in her dialect in language understood of horses, what may be written here as "Heave! Ah, hallo — heave!"

The wheels began.

Much quicker than the pen will go drew she herself upon the shaft and set herself upright, and ran five steps, and now was at the wheels, one hand beneath a spoke, the other in reciprocation of her effort skywards, the very fingers straining up.

"Heave!"

The touch of breaking was felt by her horse; enormously he strained.

"Heave!"

And felt and strained anew.

"Heave! Ah, hallo — heave!"

The wheels broke loose; forward the great horse plunged.

She ran, swift as the instant, and caught the head flung high and swung the creature to her and ran with it, now running freely, and thrust it from her now, her arm to full extent, and set it for the open gateway. Great horse and heavy cart, immense projectile, slow to be stopped now set in motion, drove at that artist where he stood. She shouted warning and he stood away, much apprehensive now how at that pace and with its impetus and clumsiness the huge affair was to come safely through the narrow gap and in the road be turned before disaster in the facing dyke.

She had no fears.

Alarmed, but ever of her movements admiration-filled, he saw her leave her lumbering horse and dart

away to where she had impaled her fork. The thing was to be done, if done the thing could be, with a calculation perilous in its nicety. She did it. With her left hand she caught her fork; sprung to the gateway and had her horse's head just as it crossed the line; cried to it; lay to it; at the exact point on the road's surface swung it about and to her; lay back with other cry and had it checked, steadied, smoothly walking.

That artist joined her. She was by her exertions scarcely flushed, her breathing not distressed, no sign nor hint of sweat; the strong, sweet odour of the horse the only note between them of their effort. She smiled at him, accepting him as though from his first appearance it had been known that he was come for her, and in her slow kind voice immediately was talking with him. She was as tall as he and he was tall. Her hand the further from him held her horse's head; with that beside him she sloped her fork upon her shoulder. He put his fingers within the bend of her elbow and dared her with his eyes. She only smiled and flexed her arm, pressing his hand. He had no cause for diffidence. At the fringe of the village where she must swing off and he go on, he had a suggestion for her and she complied with it with a naturalness perfect as might a mother to her child. She turned her face to him and he kissed her warm, soft lips. She appointed when she would be free and where meet him at nightfall.

Well, she was deficient. . . .

This artist in that sojourn that he then made painted her. The portrait, life size, hangs now in a notable private collection by whose owner, and not by him

alone, it is regarded as its chiefest treasure. (The artist was killed in the first month of the war and those favoured to look upon that portrait in the name of art much lament him). It shows her, smocked, booted, breeched, standing on a ploughland, her pitchfork on her shoulder. He called it first "Le Coeur du Sol" — The heart, or, as we would say, The spirit of the Soil; afterwards, and as it now is known, "Le Sol" — "The Soil." A pitchfork, it has been objected, was not the implement to have chosen for a setting of the plough-turned soil. Having regard to her destiny (as shall be seen) his choice was curiously prophetic; and it is strange that each of three other notable portraits of her (not by the same hand; done by others when, in a period to be touched, she was model and mistress in the Quarter) shows her again with weapon in her grasp: Hera with sickle, Juno with spear, Jeanne D'Arc with sword. All are notable, each also speaks to the type her beauty was, but that first artist's of her upon her element the soil, has pride of place. There has become attached to it the phrase written of it by a mighty critic. "A breathing and a glorious thing" were his words; and that was she, and painfully behind that artist's genius labour the sentences of this record that seeks also to depict her.

Well, in his sojourn he painted her. What else he had of her needed no telling from mouth to mouth in that village. Mouths of the respectable only concerned themselves with her, in this connection, to pass one to another the news that she was gone off with this

painter, he had taken her to Paris. Well, said the mouths, a fit end to her; the village well rid of her.

They were too soon. He congratulates himself best who congratulates himself last, and it was not in that wise that permanently she left them. The disappearance with her painter rascal to Paris was not the end to her in that place. Four years afterwards — twenty-three then — she returned (the shameless one!) and returning remained (the brazen) and remaining —

This is how she returned, how remained and how ultimately comported herself.

She returned garishly dressed (for those parts). A conspicuous automobile brought her and there sat in it beside her its owner — and hers (he was not, by many removes, that one who took her from the place). What had happened was that the lover to whom then she was passed, finding her morose, and urgent to placate her, had suggested a picnic run into the country and had named for the place of the picnic a district of her own Department of the Nord. Strange that immediately on his offer of the outing, and never before, there were aroused in her cravings more passionate, instincts more deeply sown, than even those appetites and those behests whose creature — deficient — from her brief maidenhood she had been. A craving for nature, a heart-sickness for the soil, were these much deeper instincts, now re-aroused. As a child, while in the village school her girl companions had responded to refinements of education, the soil, its creatures and its fruits upon her father's farm, had been her sole

delight; maturing, her companions drawn by refining influences to domestic tasks, she by the soil alone was called; they, in the upshot, to their graces and their fashions; the land for her! Warm from the soil, girt like a man and labouring, for love of it, more hard and long than any man, she had been found and taken. Now!

Four years divorced her from the soil. Divorced is wrong. Not husband to her was the soil but that much different, and different stronger, tie, of mother; and what to offspring of the womb, bound by the womb's mysterious affections, are four brief years that bring again the mother with wide arms?

Ah, now!

As the car — Paris, its outskirts and its border country passed — plunged deeply into leaf and lane, her keeper saw her strange. How strange from him and all the iron streets, and crowded, towering masonry, and close exhausted airs for which he stood he could not know. He saw her strange; but she was seeing the soil her mother. . . . Her mother's face before her eyes, bedewing them; her mother's breath upon her brow, caressing it; her mother's voice upon her ears, enchanting them; her mother's scents drawn at each inspiration of her breast to touch, like wine, her pulses and enrapture them. Deeper within the soil's dominion ran the car. Like essences from magic jars released, sights, sounds and savours streamed about her from the land, its brown kind breast, its fruits; its creatures, pastures, peasants; woods, waters, habitations, hills;

the patient, lovely earth; the dear obedient tilth; the earth; the land; the soil.

Ah, now!

She had been sitting forward on her seat, holding each breath she drew; tremulously drawing them as if afraid; suddenly exhaling them as she were stung. Rain had begun to fall. Her keeper objurgated it and raised the hood. She welcomed it, but said no word, but sat yet further forward that the rain might fall upon her face. They came to the place, a wood, he had designed for their picnic; but it was raining still; and she spoke then and, the rain her excuse, suggested trial farther on and told him then she knew these parts and gave directions — on to a pool, left hand beyond it, then right, then left again; right to a spinney, left until a crucifix was reached, then left again and on. . . . And now, among the paths her booted feet had trod, was called by every well-remembered tree, each gate, each hedge, each field, each very stone, and in her heart called back to them; sitting, one hand extended to the rain and to her darlings, the other at her breast.

They passed the crucifix . . . she crossed herself . . . that Christ that had received her kind . . . and on, and presently were at a haystack standing within a gate. Always a stack had stood here . . . this stack might be the same she last had seen there. . . . She bade her owner stop . . . here, beside the shelter of the stack, would do. She got out and stooped and with her hands touched the dear road. The rain had abated to a fine drizzle and she turned her face up to it and stood, her face thus turned, more than a little while.

The man, still in the car, was grumbling savagely. What fool suggestion this? To soak out here! An inn would offer itself there where that spire pointed (it was her village); he was for going there. This cursed rain . . . this cursed trip. . . .

She was not hearing. She went to the gate and through it and, her distance but a few paces, his grumbling and his impatience were continued at her. She did not hear. She went to the stack and when she reached it put out to it sudden hands, and stretched apart her arms, and laid her palms, wide as they could reach apart, upon the stack and leaned against it, pressing to it her face, and drew within her body all the savours it exhaled; reading their stories, of harvest field, of barn, of byre; hearing their music, of scythe, of reaper, groaning wain, of harvest home, of restless cattle in the sheds; and almost swooned. . . .

She went back to him and spoke to him. He was to go. She was to stay. This was her home. She was returned to it. She now could leave it never. The soil desired her. She desired the soil. "I pray thee go. I pray thee."

Through the day he had been uncomfortable. Her manner first had surprised him, then irritated, then a little alarmed him; now both alarmed and angered him. "Thy home? A trick, eh?" Much more, and ended with "Soak in thy filthy fields then, —"

He threw in his clutch and left her with the name he had applied to her; and turning in his seat called it back to her again . . . was gone.

The field stood up in barley, high in head. She dug

with her hands among the roots, deep into the rain-soft earth, and brought up both her fists filled with the gentle loam and raised them to her face and, as she had inhaled the hay, inhaled the soil, and as before interpreted it, and worked the loam between her hands, feeling it. The soil!

She took off the plumed hat she wore, and then her jacket, and within the bramble-covered ditch forced them beneath the brambles out of sight. Her blouse was modest; fashionably tucked at the sleeves, but she tore out the gathers there. Her skirt was plain. She looked at her shoes and then about her where a sharp stone was. It was easy to knock off the heels, to tear off the buckles. She had three rings and slid them from her fingers and broke a little chain about her neck; these in the ditch's bank and trodden in.

She went then to the village and to her father's house.

There had been changes in that house. Her mother had died before she went to Paris. She found her father, a man of seventy, married again and partnered now with one that had been widow of the miller of that place. Two brothers that formerly were in the home, their father's idols as was she his shame, now had got wives and dwelt, one at the mill (now her father's), one in a cottage that adjoined the farm. One other change was a new labourer — acquired but a month before — a stranger in those parts, somewhat mysteriously arrived (new residents are rare in agricultural communities) and having the singularity of

an iron hook where should have been his left hand, lost in some accident. In the village they called him the Man of the Hook, the Hook Man, and, as usually goes with possession of a nickname, he had a notable popularity.

These were the changes that she found: herself, though permitted, welcomed indeed, to return to her employment, was caused to know the change of not now being suffered to dwell within her father's house.

This was an austere woman her father had taken to second wife and her father was austere, deeply religious, a man of great physique, patriarch-bearded, respected for miles about; one that had fought in the 1870, that had (of his memories of the invader) almost for equal gods France and his Maker, and that, in earlier storms against his daughter, had beat his breast for shame to have presented such an offspring to his country and his God. However, he did not then, and did not now, refuse himself the labour she was capable of giving him. With his farm he had also now his mill; labour was scarce; here was returned to him his daughter who was a man's, two men's, worth and who moreover had not to be paid. One does not pay daughters, much less a daughter such as she, a shameless one.

Therefore he received her but received her with this tribute to his stern piety, to his respected status in the country-side and to his regard for the honour of his home (a home of his beloved France) that he would not suffer her to cross his threshold. Most straitly herein his wife, his sons and his sons' wives, supported

him. That shameless one, that thing! Let her work in the fields, but let her live on the fields! Why, if so much as the barn within the yard were offered her, would not there be visitors there to her by night, outraging these precincts!

Remote upon her father's fields was a disused hut, a cabin of a single room. Resuming her life, she lived there.

Now she was to be seen again as first she has been seen, breeched, booted, smocked, a belt about her middle; at the plough, at the spade, at the churn; with her teams, with her cows, with her swine; with her fork, with her scythe, with her pails. Her hands, in the first weeks, bruised and blistered, but she had been in Paris no rich man's woman; had scrubbed floors, cooked dishes, sewn garments, keeping the artists who kept her, model and maid and mistress. Her hands, as her limbs, never soft, soon hardened as of old.

The happiness of that kind that she was, since they deserve none, is nothing to the world whose shame they are, but it is to be said that, restored where she belonged, the soil's own natural, she now was very happy; that smile, simple, benign, maternal, ever upon her face. Out of the mill there was new work for her. Its power — a water-mill — worked also the thrashing machine that served the small farmers of the district. Their crops, since the power could not go to them, must needs be brought to the thrashing and her father added to his revenues by with his own team and wagon collecting their grain. That was her part. Atop the loaded wagon she was to be seen (just as that artist

first had seen her) mightily, easily, with consummate deftness, feeding with her fork the heavy sheaves into the great box above the machine, whence, passed to the feeding-board and there spread out, they went between the rollers, into the drum, beneath the beaters, so to emerge, the grain through the winnowing fans, thence into sacks; the separated straw through the ejectors, again to be loaded and transported whence it came. When all a load presently was worked through the thrasher, easily as her brothers and as the Hook Man working beside her, she would swing on her back the bursting sacks of grain, run them to the mill barn and with a deft swing and toss drop them in their place; then, the men gone off, stack back the straw upon the wagon and return it to the farms. In collecting, driving many miles abroad and returning afoot beside her team, she had always two great horses, sometimes three: and first, with the farmstead's help loaded its sheaves, then alone urged her giants to the load and brought them down the lanes.

Urging them to it!

"Together!" called in her high, clear voice, and with a burst of chain and bells and traces her team would take the collar; "Heave!" and with ringing clash of harness, groan of axles, beat of hoofs would start the wain.

"Together! Heave!"

"Heave! Ah, hallo — heave!" and she was at her leader's head, her hand upon the bridle, against her neck her fork.

A breathing and a glorious thing.

They called her Magdalen.

The term was truer for her than they knew. That village cried it at her as a mock. It is not so. It stands in Western hagiology for one restored to purity and elevated to saintship, restored by tears, made saint by faith. The hour of her restoration was when she leaned against that stack, when pressed within her hands that mould, and drew from them their virtues, and was by them reclaimed, and went, and sinned no more. The coming of her faith, and of, I think — but you shall judge — her martyrdom, was now.

Her faith was France.

Her faith — if faith is “I believe: help Thou mine unbelief” — had always been the soil; there came events within whose crucible the soil she loved changed from loved element into the spirit of the land whose element it was.

Enormous convulsions of the world, calamitous upheavals of mankind, first heralded, then brought about this change. The year was 1914, the period high summer. First was rumour; then were facts; then, in a night, the village stuck with proclamations; and then, responsive to them, the young men called away. Her brothers went. Her father, that had fought in '70, sent them off with head bowed down indeed, but with his fists clenched and with this cry and prayer: “The Prussian! France! Again the Prussian! France, France!”

Her father was in that period mayor of the village. On that night of the departure of the conscripts she

heard him at the Mairie address a meeting of all left, the older and the unfit men, the weeping women. It was an exhortation, his arms upraised, eyes in their hairy frames ablaze, the huge chest heaving, the great voice ringing. "France! France!" The glorious word shook through his exhortation as in few days upon the air, enormous, heart-stunning, were to shake the cannon. "France! France! Courage, my children! France! France!" And with it, also much reiterated, this:

"The blood of France to the soil of France! It is proper. It is seemly. It is good. You mothers, if you shall give your sons; you wives, if you shall give your husbands; my little ones, you, if you shall give your fathers, say only this — with pride, with song, with glory: 'The blood of France to the soil of France!'

"France! France!

"Shout with me, my people!"

And they shouted with him, all those there, their hands uplifted, "France! France! France!"

It was the cry she took with her across the fields to her cabin that night. "France!" It was the spirit that arose to her out of the fields and trod beside her. "France! France!"

"The blood of France to the soil of France." Yes, proper; yes, seemly; yes, as it should be. France! France!

There were terrible days came then. This village was very near the frontier of Belgium. In one time there passed through it, northwards, glorious battal-

ions in horizon blue, guns, lorries, wagons, horses, all war's brave panoply. France! France! Then hopes, then fears, then distant, then less distant, sound of guns. Then lines retiring south. First, in procession endless, terrible, the Croix Rouge ambulances; then guns; then wagons, lorries; then the horizon blue, stained, driven, spent, defeated.

France! France!

There was flight then from that village, furniture on carts, litter on barrows, packages on backs, children in arms, a populace that fled before the sword. Their places were not empty. Shed from those weary columns streaming through, in every house, in every room, laid in the streets, filling the church, were dead and dying and stricken.

France! France!

One of her brothers, brought there by chance, died in the Mairie in her father's arms. The old man, tearless, spoke his epitaph, "The blood of France to the soil of France. It is proper; it is right; it is as it should be." Her other brother, pale, stern, a bloody cloth about his head, passed in the weary ranks and saw her father and raised his hand in salutation and pale and stern and bloody-browed passed on. France!

Still flight.

Her father would not go, the curé would not go; while their people were here their duty was here. Others would not go; it was not to be believed the Germans could come, a day yet could be waited . . . and a day yet . . . and a day yet. Her stepmother would not go; the Hook Man, on account of his disable-

ment not called to the colours, would not go. He had disappeared from the village on the day when first the troops passed through and it was thought he had fled, but he reappeared in the time of the retirement and he was prominent, and was approved by her father, in encouraging the hearts of those who were tarrying a day yet . . . and a day yet . . .

For these, in the event, a day too long. In one moment, but diminishingly, recedingly, horizon blue; in the next, as it seemed — swiftly as press storm-driven clouds across a summer sky, suddenly as on the morning of a night of snow the window shows a landscape newly clothed — from end to end field-grey.

Here draws to close her chronicle. Normality, however calamitous the old's eruption, descends with strange celerity upon the new. That which in prospect is unspeakable — death of a leader, imposition of a drastic law — achieves to fact, and lo, normality again: the tide, whatever freight it bears, flows on. That village, in occupation, assumed a normal way. Vile deeds — executions, imprisonments, deaths violent and deaths by vile deeds welcome — passed and, coloured from hues of life to pall of dull field-grey, that village accepted the normality imposed upon it.

So much, at least, the surface showed. Deeper there moved, as moves the sap beneath the winter grip, a secret thing. There was sullen acceptance of the inevitable but there was beneath it, running among the principal inhabitants left in that place — the mayor, his wife, the curé, six other women, three other men —

a current, hidden, perilous, devoted; the sound of whose murmur was "For France!"; the well-spring of whose force, the river of whose service, was France, France! They called themselves, this body, The Twelve. With plotters similar in villages similarly occupied, they formed an organisation through which was circulated to appointed agents information touching the captors in whose midst they were, what regiments, what strength, what *morale*, what gossip of movements and intentions, sometimes through which escaped prisoners or accredited agents were passed from place to place.

The mayor was the leader of the Twelve; on a day he told his daughter of its existence and called her to its aid.

She had less work in these days of the occupation. She had seen her splendid horses led away, her cattle driven off, her farmyard creatures killed for German mouths, the mill-wheels silenced; only some desultory field work remained to her. She was lonely. She had, been, despite their common woe, no better received of her compatriots; her story somehow had been acquired by the field-grey conquerors. They mocked her with her epithet: "Yah, Magdalen!"

Now!

Hearing her father's story of the Twelve, receiving his commands, she thought her heart, swelling with emotion to know of these devoted ones and of those others, leagues about, link in whose chain these were, would burst with pride and gratitude at summons to their cause.

Her duty was to be to sentinel the meetings of the Twelve. These were held, her father told her, weekly in that room on the ground floor of the Mairie where weekly (in his office of responsibility for the French inhabitants, their behaviour and their provisioning) the inhabitants were permitted to assemble to draw the ration tickets he issued to them. It was arranged that the members of the Twelve drew last; when they alone were left their business was conducted. There had arisen fear, her father told her, that suspicion was afoot. It was necessary that a watcher should loiter without the door to give warning of approach. Thirty yards up the street from the Mairie and on the side opposite was the dwelling taken over by the German commandant of the village for his office. A sentry stood always before it. A window of the Mairie's ground floor room having a low ledge looked on the street. It was deputed to her that she should sit idling on this ledge. If any came out to approach from the commandant's office her hands, idling by her sides, should rap stealthily upon the window pane.

This was told to her in that same room at the Mairie, summoned there to her father by a message from him and being spoken to by him, for the first time since her return to the village, by the endearment "My daughter."

Her heart, for the kind term as for her sacred mission, was very full.

She said, "My father — that I am chosen — for France —"

He said to her, "My daughter, for one that is in

esteem among us to be loitering in the street there, eyeing, as thou shalt eye, that sentry, is of suspicion. For thee — ” he sighed.

She began, “ My father — if in the past — ”

He said, “ My daughter, it is known to those grey devils what thou art. Heed is not taken ” — he sighed — “ of thy sort.”

She cried, twisting her fingers, “ My father — if in the past I have been wanton — since my return — since the war — God knoweth — France — ”

He only attended her last stammered word. He said, conducting her to the door, “ It is for France. At this hour tomorrow, at the meeting, France will be in thy hands.”

She went from him, wiping her eyes, but with her heart uplifted. France! France!

As she came towards the office of the commandant she looked across at the sentry. He made with his mouth the shape of the word “ Magdalen.” She smiled at him, encouragement, of set purpose, in her smile. He grinned return. She smiled again. France! There stepped at that moment into the doorway, emerging from the commandant’s office, the man of one arm, her father’s labourer. The hook of his left arm was held to his right hand and he was busy, when she caught sight of him, with papers that he held there; she could see his thumb rapidly moving upon them. He was close beside the sentry and she thought the sentry spoke to him. He thrust within his breast what it was that he held in his hand and with the motion looked up towards her and then came to her. She noticed, a

singularity in those hungry days, how much stouter he had grown. He drew her a few paces, eyed backwards at the sentry, and drew her on again, a secretive gesture. "My papers," he said and touched the breast of his jacket where she had seen him thrust his hand. "They have been examining me, those grey devils in there. I am suspect, I."

He nodded at her as though his eyes, full of meaning, should tell her more than dared be spoken. "They are clever, those in there," he said; "but I am more clever, I that you see before you." He nodded again, very meaningly. "It is for France," he whispered.

She began, "Art thou — "; but her father had told her the Twelve, not naming this one, and she stopped.

He said, "There is service for France at work here. If thou shouldst learn of it, tell me. I also would be of that number."

She had no impulse to tell him; her thought was of pride in being the repository of knowledge, for France, not vouchsafed to him; but she thought also eagerly of telling her father of one anxious to be recruited, and she slept scarcely at all that night, devising more ways by which she could assist the Twelve and through them France . . . France . . . France!

She is to be pictured on that morrow approaching up the street the Mairie at the hour appointed, smocked, booted, breeched, a breathing and a glorious thing and, of her mission, with glory in her heart. She had her pitchfork on her shoulder. She had come from and, her mission done, would pass on to, its use. She

is to be pictured, the lesser people gone, the Twelve within, seated upon the window ledge, her left hand set upon her pitchfork's shaft, as she had been a statue carved in stone : a queen with spear.

Herself, motionless, the sentry thirty yards away, motionless, were the only persons in the street. She watched him; sometimes he stared at her.

France!

She presently remembered that both her hands should be ready against the glass behind her to drum, if need should be, her warning. The window was against the doorway of the Mairie. She placed the fork, prongs upward, by the doorpost and put her hands beside her.

In a while there emerged from the room one of the Twelve, then another, two others then; then her step-mother, next the curé, others, lastly her father. None were to notice her — she who was noticed of none — and none did. Severally they passed from sight; their footsteps died away; she and the sentry shared again the silent street.

France!

Well, it was finished. She had been commanded of her father not to leave her place for some time after the dispersal, and for some time she remained. Now she thought she might go; and to cherish to herself the place where France, in her keeping, had been served, she turned and through the window peered within the room. She peered. Her task for France was done. . . .

It was not done.

Against the wall of the room straight opposite the

window a tall cupboard stood. As she peered, she saw, and caught her breath, this cupboard's door move slowly outwards. There came through the aperture and held the door, advancing it, not the fingers of a hand but the head of a hook. She stood up. Her drumming heart began her thoughts with "France" and with "France" ended them. She thought:

"France! He that mysteriously came to this village and that was friend with all and that, of his arm, could not be called to the colours. . . . He that strangely went and strangely came again, bidding the people stay. He that, while the rest, of meagre rations, grew thin, was grown fat. He that, but the day ago, she had seen coming from the commandant's office with in his hands — *money!* . . . He that had asked her to tell him if she should hear of secret service. . . . He that, during this conference of the Twelve, with whom were linked God knew how many others, had been concealed and listening . . . France!"

She stepped past her pitchfork to the door and opened it. He was emerged from the cupboard and was in the room's centre, advancing. At her appearance he stopped. She outstretched at him an arm denouncing him and she spoke to him in a voice terrible to hear one word:

"Isca-ri-ot!"

There was a vile look came upon his face and he answered her out of it, "Yah, Magdalen!" But he laughed and the look of mingled hate and fear was gone. The game was his.

He laughed and said, "I have twelve at a blow here."

He touched his forehead, "I have here twice twelve." He put out his hook and his hand, "I have here in my hands a chain of such from Amiens to Brussels." He stepped towards her and pushed her violently, "Out of my way, thou dirt!"

Now this happened. He thrust past her and put hand and hook in his pockets and went five paces up towards the German sentry, whistling. She was thrust outwards by his push and she staggered and caught at the doorpost, and her right hand, swinging round, struck the shaft of her pitchfork standing there and she gripped it. He was going to betray France and she was there for France. He had not yet betrayed France and she was there for France. She stepped out with her right foot a great stride from the wall of the Mairie and she swung up the pitchfork, held where it balanced, as a spear is held. He looked round at her to laugh at her again but at what, looking round, he saw he did not laugh. He snatched his hands from his pockets and cried out terribly and made to run in at her. The fork was going back to the extension of her arm and he did not dare to run in at her. He turned and threw up his arms and screamed to the sentry and ran shouting.

At the sound of his first scream there was an officer came out from the commandant's and stood with the sentry and saw. She was poised more gloriously than ever in her labours she had been poised. Her right leg was bent and to the point of over-reaching she was bent back upon it. Her left leg was forward, twisted from the thigh so that the toe of its boot, reversed, alone

held the ground. Her right arm so far as it could stretch was behind her head, the fork aligned. Her left arm, the fingers of the hand extended, was strained towards the flying figure.

The officer cried to the sentry, "Shoot, fool and dog!"

She swung with all her force her body forward, and launched her fork, and it sped swift and straight and struck him that ran upon the loins, so that he screamed and flung up his arms and plunged face downwards and lay there, blood in his mouth, pierced vitally.

"Shoot, dolt and swine!"

The sentry three times pressed his trigger, *tac — tac — tac!* and by the hollow vault of the street the sound, duplicated, was returned, *tacca — tacca — tacca!*

She was come upright. She put her left hand to her breast. Between her extended fingers the blood of France appeared, welled, and was returned to the soil of France. She swayed back. She swayed forward. She fell to her knees. She fell on her face, her hand to her heart, her other arm extended, the fingers of its open hand clutching the soil.

France!

THERE STILL ARE FAIRIES

THERE STILL ARE FAIRIES

Oh, yes, there still *are* fairies and here is a case in point; but I have to warn you that a story with fairies in it nowadays is very different from the jolly sort of the times when fairies had everything their own way. Nowadays life has become extraordinarily hard for fairies, and they have to put up with a great many things they never would have endured in the lovely days when they could change a king into a bluebottle and let him buzz till he burst for all *they* cared.

They can't do that *now*.

Not likely!

Why can't they? Well, it isn't as you might suppose because modern contrivances like policemen and wireless and electric light and all that get in their way. Oh dear, no! They could put a policeman into the middle of next week as easy as winking; but he'd have to be the right *kind* of policeman and that's just what is the difficulty. You see, fairies, though you may not know it, do their wonders through the hearts of people and I don't know why it is (at least I could guess but I'm not telling), but the hearts of people, alike of policemen and of kings, of courtiers and of commoners, have hardened to such an extent of recent years that fairies absolutely can't do anything with them. Absolutely not a thing! In the old days a fairy would get into a

heart and the thing melted wherever she touched it. Nowadays a fairy gets into a heart and it's like being in a cellar with the door bricked up. It's not even brick. It's this frightful stuff they use instead of brick — concrete, I think they call it. A fairy will crawl into a heart like that — they used to flutter into hearts in the old days, now they have to crawl — will crawl into a heart like that and break as many as a couple of dozen wands and never make an impression as deep as a scratch. The fairy, utterly exhausted, simply crawls out again and goes back to fairyland and reports and cries. The volume of tears in fairyland last year alone was such that — well, perhaps you've noticed how much more rain there is than there used to be?

Yes, that's the reason.

But there still *are* fairies; and if they can get into a heart where they can operate — well, listen.

The Fairy Queen, who had just dug her way out of the heart of a modern young woman where she had been jolly nearly entombed, was away having her wings ironed and an elderly fairy with a grim, sharp look was taking her place and giving out the orders.

"Henry Bassett," said the elderly fairy to a new small fairy with a rosy mouth. "Henry Bassett for you. Off you go!"

"Henry Bassett!" cried the new small fairy, absolutely staggered. "Henry Bass — ! Buttercups and Bull's-eyes!"

"No swearing, please!" said the elderly fairy very sharply.

So off the staggered little fairy went to see about it.

At five minutes past four on an afternoon very shortly afterwards the express from London was awaited at Tidborough station by a great crowd of the kind called "an ugly crowd." The men wore cloth caps, rough clothes and scarves about their necks; the women were mostly hatless and concealed beneath shawls their meanest wear. This was because the whole of the finery of the female hands of Bassett's Paper Mills, together with the Sunday clothes of the men, was in the care of the Tidborough pawnbrokers.

Ugly to the eye, the crowd had also an ugly air, sullen, sinister, threatening. It emitted, as it shifted and swayed beneath its own pressure, a hostile and a deep murmuring that swelled to the station roof and there reverberated as mutters distant thunder. A fortnight before, similarly assembled, it would have temporized the violent strength that manifestly lay within it by coarse chaff and banter and by cheery hailings, one to another. But not now. Bassett's strikers were past that stage. They were hungry. At the outset of the strike they had been noisy; they paraded the streets and sang songs; and, touching the matter of food, joked of "tightening your belt up a couple of holes." Now they were no longer noisy. They stood silently about the bakers' shops, and the bakers were anxious and asked for and got police.

The strikers had been genial, then jovial, then irritable, then angry. They were now ferocious, and the immediate object of their ferocity was approaching them, assembled at the station, in the 4.5 p.m. from London: Tug Sanders, "The Strike-breaker."

Strike-breaking by the importation of workers from another district has never been successfully established in England. It was the notion of Mr. Tug Sanders that it could be done, and that he was the man to do it; he had been given some publicity by the Press; and, reading of the prolonged strike at Bassett's Paper Mills, Tidborough, he had communicated with Mr. Henry Bassett, their proprietor. Henry Bassett, stubborn, determined, constitutionally impervious to any other reasoning than his own, an embittered man, a lonely man, a man with a grudge against all men, proud to his marrow and hard to the bone, knowing public opinion in Tidborough unanimously against him and steeled by that knowledge, had replied to Mr. Tug Sanders's communication. Mr. Sanders had triumphantly announced to the Press that he was "proceeding to Tidborough with a view to arranging to break the strike at Bassett's Paper Mills"; and the employes of Bassett's Paper Mills were now assembled at Tidborough station with a view to breaking the neck of Mr. Tug Sanders and kicking his remains across the market place.

She's signalled! A sharper note ran through the murmur of the crowd. Police constables, foiled in attempts to clear the station or line the platform, became, in scattered units, as excitement seethed, centres of violent eddies in a vast mass that yielded from end to end as a quicksand trembling within its borders. One tried to draw his truncheon. Above the sea of pallid faces his crimson visage, blue-helmetted, showed vividly a moment like a red buoy, blue-topped, violently agitated

from beneath, upon a dingy foam; in the next it was as violently swept along and sunk and gone.

Here she comes!

Far up the line, superbly round the bend, gloriously down the straight — gold-helmed, white-pennoned engine; dull-red, submissive coaches; a captain with his cohort, a sultan with his train, an enormous and majestic and imperious thing causing the obsequious earth to tremble — effortlessly with shut-off steam, tremendously with roaring brakes and dinning valves, the 4.5 came on Tidborough.

Immediately the mass upon the platform convulsed in mighty surgings; rushes from behind; in front men almost toppled on the line and battling frantically; oaths flying; blows exchanged.

“All right! All right! Where you coming to! What the hell! Take that, then!”

“An’ that for you!”

Into this uproar the 4.5; and at once cessation of the private brawls; at once a common rush, shouting, fist-tossing, upon the train.

Threatening and sweaty faces pressed against the windows and surged along them.

“Where is he?”

“Where’s the — ?”

“Hand him out!”

“Throw him out! Throw him out!”

“We want Tug Sanders!”

And suddenly, with the mysterious unanimity that instructs a mob, there was taken up by every voice a crashing chant.

"We want Tug Sanders!"

"We want Tug Sanders!"

Feet were accommodated to the rhythm. While those in front pursued their eager quest, wrenching open doors and shouting their ferocious inquiry among shrinking passengers, the crowded masses behind trod out the measure with hobnailed boots crashing in unison with vibrant throats.

"We — want — Tug — Sanders!"

"We — want — Tug — Sanders!"

It was rather frightening to hear.

Mr. Tug Sanders heard it and stood not upon the order of his going but went at once. He had been warned; and he had arrived alert to pay behest to the warning. At the junction forty miles up the line there had been handed to him a telegram from the Tidborough Superintendent of Police.

"Very hostile crowd assembled at station.

You are advised to leave train by up-side door."

One glimpse as the train drew into Tidborough had been quite enough for Mr. Sanders, a man of notably quick perceptions. The 4.5 was not come to complete stop before the famous strike-breaker was nimbly out of the further door of his compartment and fleeting across the rails in purposeful testimony to the great law of self-preservation.

Safety first.

The 4.5 drew out. To the tumult of the ravaging strikers she had added her own enormous din of escaping steam. Now, as they realised disappointment and

bafflement, she whooped sardonic comment upon them from her whistle and slid enormously away to her own business, leaving them to theirs. Very quickly the platform cleared. Disappointed of its prey, returned to the hard facts of the lock-out, the mob took counsel with itself, and presently announced its judgment in loud shouts of "To the Old Man's! To the Old Man's!" At six o'clock the Old Man — Mr. Bassett — was to receive a deputation. Any hopes concerning it had been dissolved when it became known that he would first receive Mr. Tug Sanders; and the famous strike-breaker, it was now rumoured, had arrived, given them the slip, and was well on his way to the Old Man's house. It commended itself to the strikers to assemble about the Old Man's gates and hear the result immediately their deputation left the presence. They shambled into a marching formation and moved away, slouching, silent, dangerous.

Upon the station platform meanwhile there had been reproduced the best-known fable of Phaedrus. "A mountain was in labour, sending forth dreadful groans, and there was in the region the highest expectation. After all, it brought forth an absurd mouse."

The 4.5, when it drew out, instead of leaving upon the platform the colossal personality expected of it, grotesquely deposited only the tiny figure of a little girl. Her hair was bobbed (this, by the way, was some years ago when bobbing was uncommon), her face was pale, her eyes were large. She had a small tin box and she carried a large satchel; and she stood there, looking extraordinarily tiny and quaint till a porter,

detaching himself from watching the departing strikers, observed her and came towards her. This porter knew nothing of Latin tags relative to a mountain bringing forth a mouse — he had never been to school — but it struck him as odd, the mighty personage that had been expected and the tiny object that had been left, and he rather grinned as he advanced to her.

“Now then, missy, what’s for you?”

The little girl said primly, “Good afternoon, porter. If you please, I want a hansom cab”; and she added, as if she apprehended a thought in his mind, “You must understand I am quite accustomed to hansom cabs and allowed to go in them, because I come from London. There are simply millions of hansom cabs in London, you know.”

The porter, being entirely unaccustomed to children, was able to treat them just as they like being treated. “That so?” he said seriously.

“Oh, millions. Have you ever been to London?”

The porter had not had this advantage.

“You ought to ask the station-master to let you go one day. It’s a most wonderful place, you know. My dear Aunt Victoria says the City of London is the hub-bub of the Empire.”

“That so?” said the porter.

The little girl nodded in vigorous confirmation. “And it is noisy!”

She was in stature scarcely at the level of the porter’s waist, but in her singular self-possession and primness she was completely the dominant partner in these exchanges; and she now, by a glance towards the exits

and a gesture of her shoulders, quite clearly instructed the porter that the requirements of polite interchange were fulfilled, and that his duties must now be attended.

He swung up her box in one horny fist and again obeying a gesture extended the other towards her. She took it and gave the explanation she seemed to think necessary. "You see, I'm only eight," she said, "and in railway stations I always hold my dear mamma's hand."

"Ain't your mamma come with you then?" inquired the porter.

Her reply caused him to look sharply down at her, trotting by his side.

"Oh, no. You see, my dear mamma is dead."

The brim of her hat permitted the porter to see only the lower part of her face. He caught a quick protrusion and withdrawal of her lips. He felt awkward.

"Ah, dear, dear!" he said.

"She's with God," said the little girl, and most forlornly sighed.

"That so?" said the porter.

He felt immediately — he was a man of rather delicate perceptions (for a porter) — that this was an inept remark, but he had been rather taken aback and it had been jerked out of him on the rebound (as he might have explained it). To cover it, and to get well away from it, he said in a changed and hearty voice, "And where might you be making to now, missy?"

"I'm going to my dear Uncle Henry."

"That so?" said the porter. "And what might your uncle's name be, missy?"

The little girl replied, rather as if she had learnt it by heart, "My dear Uncle Henry is Henry Bassett, Esquire, The Old Court House, near Penny Green, Tidborough."

The porter whistled. The thing — the coincidence — was so completely astounding to him that he had no words to suit it. He felt dazed, and in dazed silence he led the way into the station yard. Three or four hansom cabs were in waiting. He hailed one, and as it came jingling up (the little girl watching it with an ecstatic air of much approving proprietorship) prepared to hand on his amazement to its driver.

He swung up her box, the driver stiffly reaching tightly overcoated arms for it: "Wherever don't you think this fare's bound for?"

The driver, who was no public speaker, vouchsafed only the surly grunt of one to whom the vagaries of fares were as nothing. But for the porter's reply he clearly was not prepared.

"Old Bassett's," said the porter.

The driver jerked up his head. "Not on your life?" He had a very deep, suspicious voice and a very small, beery and suspicious eye. "Not on your life she ain't?"

"Ask of her, than," affirmed the porter with the pride of one that has released a startler. He looked towards the little girl. She was standing by the horse's head, her hands clasped in ecstatic adoration. "Calls 'im her dear Uncle Henry."

"Not on your life she don't?"

The porter nodded impressively. "Said it to me with her own lips right there on the platform." He pointed towards the platform and the driver stood up where he sat and looked earnestly towards it as if to see what explanation of this astounding circumstance it might have to offer. "There was they," said the porter, thoroughly well pleased with himself, "there was they waiting for this yer strike-breaker, and there's the strike-breaker as has come and —" He broke off, for the little girl had turned from the horse and was approaching him, her fingers in her purse.

"Thank you, porter," she addressed him. "That's very nice. Here is threepence for you. Just lift me up to the step, will you. And in case, porter, any of the four-wheelers are annoyed I took a hansom, just tell them, please, it's because I like to watch the horse." She was on the footboard of the cab and she caught the driver's small and suspicious eye astoundingly regarding her over the roof; but with the air of one doing the correct thing she ignored his eye and gave her instruction to the porter. "I'll tell the man where to go from inside."

"I've told him, missy," said the porter.

She was working herself on to the seat, sitting on her legs tucked beneath her. She said reprovingly, "But I still will, if you don't mind. My dear mamma always tells him from the inside when he looks through the little hole in the top."

"That so?" said the porter and stepped back and

stared upon the driver with eyes that asked, "Did you ever?"

A yellow eye now gazed lambently down upon the little girl through the roof-trap. She addressed it, "If you please, I am going to my dear Uncle Henry; to Henry Bassett, Esquire, The Old Court House, near Penny Green, Tidborough. What's your horse's name?"

The eyes of the porter on the pavement said, "Ah, now it's your turn!" The yellow eye of the driver, raised in astonishment from the trap, gazed first upon his horse, then upon the porter, and then inside his hat, lifted for that purpose as though with some expectation of finding the horse's name there written. A great difficulty faced the driver and it was that the only name by which he ever called his horse was, "Blast Yer" — "Get up, blast yer. Now then, blast yer. Whoa, blast yer."

He was, however, though a slowish man, a man of resource. A powerful aroma of beer descended upon the little girl. "What name would you like him to be called, lady?"

She twisted up her face to the beer vent. "I should *like* him to be called Black Beauty."

"That's what he is called," said the driver hoarsely.

"Although he's brown?" said the little girl quickly.

The driver raised his head and blew an enormous discharge of beery fumes across the top of his cab. "Hoo-oo-oo-ff!" He gazed despairingly at the porter but saw no sympathy there. He again applied his face to the trap. "'Is mane's black, lady, *an'* 'is tail."

"So they are! So they are!" cried the little girl and struck her hands together. "Do you mind if I click him off?"

"Not a bit, lady," said the driver, relieved.

"T'ck! T'ck!" clicked the little girl. "Gee up, Black Beauty!"

The driver thought hard, though slowly, during the long drive to the Old Court House. He was in violent sympathy with the strikers and entertained a violent opinion of Henry Bassett; and in the fuddled way in which, consequent upon his chief interest in life, the processes of his mind worked, he had a sullen notion that he was playing false to the strikers by permitting a relative of the hated Bassett in his cab. The notion swelled to a head as the cab overtook, passed through and left the ranks of the marchers. He was cogitating some remarks to the little girl on the subject of her uncle when the roof-trap was agitated from beneath and he raised it and looked down.

The little girl, who had climbed upright to get at the trap, was resettling herself upon her curled-up legs. "I just wanted to say," she said, "please flick those flies off Black Beauty's ears. Thank you. You must watch for them, you know. Where were all those men going to?"

The question was pleasant to the driver. He had the feeling, cumulative upon his attitude towards the strikers, that his horse must be thinking him a fool or gone mad thus finickingly to apply the lash he customarily used with all his arm behind it. He said with

harsh emphasis, "They're going to see your dear uncle."

"*Are they?*" cried the little girl. "Is it a party?"

"*Party?*" growled the driver, "*Party?*"

"You've been drinking beer, haven't you?" said the little girl.

"Yes, lady," said the driver, and closed the trap.

The Old Court House was approached by massive iron gates and a short drive. The front door stood within cavernous portals in which the little girl, standing before it, looked rather like a fly at the bottom of a large teacup. The driver, descending, rang for her the bell-pull which depended like a giant's club far above her head, climbed to his perch and gathered up his reins.

"For the less I sees of these 'ere, lady," said the driver, "the better I feels."

"When I'm not feeling very well," said the little girl, "my dear mamma gives me syrup of figs."

The driver withdrew himself.

A very tall, thin man with the appearance of having been baked dry in an oven opened the door and looked all about him till the little girl coughed, when he looked towards his boots and observed her.

"If you please," said the little girl, "I've come to stay with my dear uncle."

Stupefaction took voice within the tall man. "Come to stay with your dear uncle?" he repeated. "Come to stay with —"

"Yes, thank you," said the little girl and stepped over

the threshold and began very industriously to wipe her feet on the mat.

The man stared down with the air of one watching an astounding and uncanny phenomenon. "Is it Mr. Bassett you mean?"

"Excuse my not answering before," said the little girl after a pause in which her feet continued vigorously to work. "I go nine times with each foot and have to count. How many times do you go?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't quite say as to that," said the tall man. With the porter and the driver he found himself as it were mesmerically overpowered.

The little girl regarded him interestedly. "I suppose it's a habit with you. My dear mamma says that in time it becomes a habit and then you stop counting. Do you do the backs of your heels like this or like this?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't quite say as to that, miss," said the tall man. He cleared his throat. "I was inquiring, miss, if it was Mr. Bassett you meant for your uncle?"

"Oh, yes," said the little girl. "My dear Uncle Henry. It couldn't be either of my other dear uncles, you see — my dear Uncle Barnabus or my dear Uncle William — because my dear mamma says they're not on speaking terms with my dear Uncle Henry, so they couldn't be here, could they?"

"I'm afraid I couldn't quite say as to that, miss," said the tall man. "I don't seem to recollect the gentlemen." He made an uncertain motion towards the interior of the hall. "What name might it be, miss?"

"Lucy," said the little girl. "What's yours?"

"Cleggs, miss," said the tall man, speaking, like the porter, on the rebound of surprise. He hesitated, but as the little girl appeared willing to accept this without comment, he drifted uncertainly up the hall and, knocking discreetly, passed through a doorway.

The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills sat at a writing table, fingering some papers and looking the man impervious to any reasoning but his own, the solitary and embittered man with a grudge against all men, the man proud to the marrow and hard to the bone, that he was reputed to be and that unquestionably he was. His clean-shaven face was the setting of eyes that were like dull grey stones, hard and cold as such, and that appeared to be lidless, so fixed their gaze; and of a mouth whose lips were tightly pressed together as though he held something upon his tongue.

He looked up and spoke in an austere voice as of one pronouncing a judgment. "If that's the deputation, Cleggs —"

Cleggs began, "I beg your pardon, sir, it's —" and turned at something that was pushing like a dog against his legs.

"I can't quite get past you," said the little girl in her high, clear voice. "Thank you. Didn't you know I was just behind you when you stopped?" She advanced to the writing table. "Are you my dear Uncle Henry?"

"Who are you?" demanded Mr. Bassett. He might have been addressing a burglar.

"I'm your little niece, Lucy."

Mr. Bassett set his hands upon the arms of his chair and appeared to constrict them. "Lucy's child!" He turned his hard glance sharply across the room. "Get out of here," he said to Cleggs. He said to the little girl very roughly, "What nonsense is this? Where do you come from?"

"From London. I've come to stay with you. Have you got something in your mouth?"

"It will be time for you to ask questions," said Mr. Bassett, "and not rude or stupid questions, when you have answered mine."

"Thank you," said the little girl. "I only asked because you hold your lips pressed up like I hold mine when I have codliver oil and can't bear to swallow it. What was your question?"

"My question was what nonsense is this? Where is your mother?"

The little girl swallowed before she spoke. "My dear Uncle Henry, please don't cry but be brave. My dear mamma is dead."

The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills said, "Lucy — dead!"

"She's with God," said the little girl and sighed again the enormous sigh heard by the porter. "I'm not to cry, and I haven't — feel my handkerchief."

The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills disregarded the invitation. "When did she die?"

"On Tuesday."

"Who was there?"

"Only me."

"Where was she buried?"

“ At Kensal Green.”

“ Who was there? ”

“ Only me.”

The little girl's lips were swiftly protruded and withdrawn. “ I find if I pinch my nose it's a great help,” she said. “ I think I will.”

It was a little pathetic; on the stage or in the best stories a tear would have stolen down Mr. Bassett's grim, cold cheek and the rest would be easy. It is lovely but it is not life. It doesn't really happen. Consider the most curmudgeonly old man you know — your employer or your own wealthy uncle — and ask yourself if any such news as the death of his one-time favourite sister would immediately cause him to violate the characteristics of a lifetime and soften like a pound of butter in the sun. You know perfectly well that nothing less than a poleaxe would soften him. It was the same here. No tear stole down Mr. Bassett's grim, cold cheek. He did not so much as wince. As a child he had been devotedly attached to his sister Lucy. In youth she had kept house for him. He had quarrelled violently and tyrannically with her; and the hard but human fact is that his childhood's affections and the impulses of his youth were screwed and battered down beneath forty years of brass-bound, water-proofed, steel-enforced, iron-clamped, triple-locked self-interest.

He did not even wince. “ Only you,” he said solidly. “ Only you? Your uncles, your aunt, they were in touch with her, where were they? ”

The little girl was still pinching the bridge of her

nose. "If you can see any tears," she announced, "it's the pinching. My dear Aunt Victoria and my dear uncles said it was most unfortunate for them, but you can't put off a wedding just because any one is ill; and afterwards my dear aunt came and explained you couldn't put it off for a funeral. It was my dear Cousin Kate's wedding, and my dear Uncle William said it was a most important catch — no, match. Would it be catch or match?"

"Catch, if I know my dear sister Victoria," said Mr. Bassett.

"A most important catch," continued the little girl, "and it would have looked so strange if they weren't there. And my dear Uncle Barnabas said it was most unfortunate being the same day and ——"

"Ah, like them, like them!" interpolated the proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills. "I can see them; I can hear them!"

"*Can* you?" said the little girl, and stood on tiptoe and looked along the line of her uncle's sight.

He laughed.

He laughed and — listen to this — it was his laugh, and no groan, that did actually cause a stir and a creaking of the massy baulks beneath which, like soft green leaves pressed dry and skeletonized in a book, his childhood's generous qualities lay. He laughed. His thought was, "What an idea! What a child! What a thing to be so ingenuously simple as that! Imagine it, if one could be a child like that? Ay, me, if one could!"

He laughed, and somewhere deep within him a

twinge responded. He laughed; and all the new little fairies of the same term as the fairy with the rosy mouth (who of course had got into Mr. Bassett's heart and had caused the twinge) stood on tiptoe with excitement where they watched on the wide steps of fairyland. "If only she can get him laughing!" cried all the new little fairies and hopped and skipped in their little gauze combinations. "If only she can!"

All Mr. Bassett said, snapping off the laugh, was, "Where were you living—in lodgings?"

The little girl nodded. "In our lodgings, yes. Do you know" — she put a hand on the table in the motion of calling particular attention — "Do you know, our landlady's grown-up daughter was in the pantomime. She was! She was in the fourth row and her mother said she would have been in the front row only she had thin legs on her father's side. Which side of you is your father's side?"

He laughed again, this time a full and free laugh; and all the little fairies hugged themselves for joy and cried "Hush! Hush!" to one another and tiptoed again.

"Well, you're all on your mother's side," he said, "if that's any explanation to you." And he ended again, to himself, "Ay, me!" — not because he was thinking of her mother, for he was not, but because he was thinking of himself. And though pages might be written of what he was thinking of himself, they might with equal clearness and poignancy (for those who suddenly glimpse something they have lost) be written just as he expressed it — "Ay, me!"

He said to her, "Do you know, when you walked in at that door just now you were about as likely to stay and live here as Cleggs is to stand on his head."

"*Can* he?" cried the little girl, enormously interested.

"You'd better ask him. But suppose you do stay here? What an idea! How could you? There'd be all sorts of difficulties."

The little girl seemed quite to appreciate this. He was frowning over certain of the difficulties, and she reflected his frown. "There'd be my back to wash," she said.

He laughed quite easily. "That particular difficulty hadn't occurred to me. I daresay we could get over that."

"Well, I can do everything else for myself. It's only my back when I have my bath."

He was not really thinking of practical difficulties. Practical difficulties never stood in the way of the proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills; that was why he was so rich and so hated. The difficulties he was thinking of were his affections for his habits. All very well to have this little girl in the house and to have around him always this — this freshness, this *newness*; but how about giving up his accustomed mode of life and his accustomed outlook on life, and the bearing and the behaviour in life that his fellow-men were accustomed to see in him? Forty years habituated in it. Forty years — ay, me! But still —

But he kept up the pretence of practical difficulties. "How about lessons? Don't you have to do lessons?"

It was the merest dalliance; but all the little fairies hugged themselves anew to hear him dallying. "He'll go too far in a moment!" cried all the little fairies, jumping in their little combinations.

"My dear mamma did me my lessons," said the little girl. "I can show you and you can do me them, because, do you know, I've got the very books that you and my dear mamma used when you were little like me. They've got your marks in them. I've got them here."

She took from a chair the satchel she had brought with her and put it on the table. "There was no room in my box," said the little girl. She pulled out small and battered volumes. "There they are. Do you remember them?"

"I remember them," he said; and at his tone, "Oh, poor thing!" cried all the little fairies.

The little girl had opened one of the books and was turning over the leaves before him. "Look, those are your marks when you were learning. Your dear mamma used to put the dates every day and so did mine."

He rather stolidly regarded the thumbled pages, his mother's pencil marks, the old-fashioned wood-cuts and the little readings in huge print. He was not touched by it all as, on the stage or in the best stories, he would have been touched. What he felt was a strange but unmistakable delight in the funny little old book with its grotesquely pious and moral tales. His sole reading was the *Times* and the *Financial Times*. This stuff was delicious! And once it had thrilled him! "Ay, me!"

The little girl thought he must have finished the page at which he was staring. "That was your reading book," she said. "My dear mamma says you and she both simply loved it. There was one page — a poetry page — she said you couldn't understand. I'll show you."

She flattened before him a page conspicuously white compared with the finger-stained others; obviously seldom read. It had three stiff wood-cuts: a small urchin sporting after a butterfly; a young man walking a path and looking at a bird above him, presumably in song; a middle-aged man seated on a bench in the attitude of reflection.

He remembered the pictures perfectly. His eyes read the verse accompanying them:

"Shades of the prison-house begin to close
 Upon the growing boy,
 But he beholds the light, and whence it flows
 He sees it in his joy;
 The youth, who daily further from the East
 Must travel, still is Nature's priest,
 And by the vision splendid
 Is on his way attended;
 At length the man perceives it die away,
 And fade into the light of common day.
 Whither is fled the visionary gleam?
 Where is it now, the glory and the dream?"

It was unfair. The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills was smitten between the joints of his harness. There must be a hiatus. He is as entitled as any other citizen to suffer his wound unobserved in the privacy

of his own room. He was forty years deep in the prison; forty years from the glory and forty years from the dream; and he was in the company of a little girl upon whom no shades of the prison-house had yet descended, which rather intensified and showed up his condition. Why expose his thoughts?

The little girl waited an enormously long time for him to speak. Her own thoughts, stoutly kept away by trains, porters, hansom cabs, drivers, and uncles, crowded upon her while she waited.

At last she said, "Do you understand that poetry page now, Uncle?"

He said rather heavily, "I understand it." He turned in his chair towards her. "You're going to stay with me all right. What would you like to do — first?"

The little girl said, "I'd like — most awfully — to cry."

("Look out! Look out!" cried all the little fairies.)

The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills extended his hands to her.

She said, "Do you think my dear mamma would mind?"

The proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills swallowed something. "She'll know I said you might."

The little girl's face began to work with extraordinary convulsions.

He opened his arms to her.

"That's done it! That's done it!" cried all the little fairies and hopped and skipped in their little combinations about the floor of fairyland.

The little girl sobbed with an abandonment to grief utter, complete, enormous, devastating. Every fibre and particle of her small body seemed to contribute to the abandonment. It was like a universal capitulation of all her parts rushing to the call of one stream as river banks to a flood. Her face was buried in the shoulder of the proprietor of Bassett's Paper Mills. He had never seen anything like such grief. He never had imagined that anything like it could be. Once or twice she cried, "My dear mamma! My dear mamma!" He put an awkward hand to her head and stroked it and held her rather tight.

And beneath the catastrophic collapse of her emotions he was himself undergoing a huge and monstrous capitulation, a washing out, a surging up from under, that the little twinges when he laughed at her had begun. He began to suffer the extraordinary feeling that he was not so much holding her as himself holding on to her. He was thinking all kinds of things. The only thing that, in decency to him, need be reported, was the thought, "This infernal strike! That's in the way! Infernal thing!" Also this thought, "It's time to get out of it. Turn it into a company. Getting too old. Don't understand these new ideas about work-people. Get out of it. Potter about — with this scrap." And again, "This infernal strike! In the way! Infernal thing!"

The violence of her passionate sorrow ran its course. It ebbed away in long heaves, little shudders. He sat her upright on his knee and with a handkerchief wiped her eyes. "Feel better? Better now, eh?"

He put the handkerchief in his pocket. "Look here. I expect you'd like to do something for me, wouldn't you?"

She nodded. She couldn't quite as yet get words.

"There're some people waiting here to see me. Cleggs has been in and out of the room while you've been having your cry. I want you just to go in and say something to them for me, will you?"

She nodded again. Her sniffs would have made a vacuum-cleaner feel jealous. But she brightened very much at the idea of a thing to do. She nodded more vigorously. "Is it the p-party?"

"You might call it a party." He set her on her feet. "They're in the room straight opposite across the hall. Just go in and say to them from me" — he told her what to say. "Can you remember that?"

"Oh, yes. It sounds funny to me. Will they understand?"

"You see! Well, perhaps — look, if they don't, give them this." He wrote on a slip of paper and handed it to her.

Six persons awaited the little girl. The strikers' deputation consisted of four men and two women. They sat along one side of the table in the great dining-room on chairs arranged for them by Cleggs and they sat silently with rather sad, anxious eyes fixed on the door. Have you ever seen the eyes of bullocks looking out through the gates of a slaughter house? They had been kept waiting a long time and they boded no good from the delay. That strike-breaker!

The handle of the door turned slowly. "Oh, my God!" said one of the women.

The door, instead of opening very wide to admit the master, opened but a few inches. The little girl slid in through the aperture and turned and stood on tiptoe to put both hands to the handle and shut it again.

The deputation simply stared.

The little girl came up to the table and looked over it. "If you please," she said, "my dear uncle says your terms are granted."

The deputation simply stared.

The little girl nodded in a friendly way. "Yes, your terms are granted. That's what my dear uncle told me to tell you."

They were all on their feet.

"Granted!" cried one; and "Granted!" another.

The woman who had made the exclamation as the door began to open came quickly round the table and struck her hands together upon her shrunken bosom before the little girl. "Dearie, you wouldn't deceive. Dearie, for the love of God —"

"There's this paper," said the little girl, surprised, for she had never been to a party like this before.

The paper went to the hands of an old man who had had the centre place at the table. He read it aloud in a trembling voice:

"Your terms are granted. The works will open in all departments at 6.0 a.m., to-morrow. The new scale will take effect forthwith.

Henry Bassett.

N. B. Furnaceman should attend at 4.0 a.m."

The old man dropped heavily on his chair and put his arms on the table and buried his head in them. Some one said, "Praise God! — Praise God!" The woman facing the little girl dropped on her knees and clasped the little girl terribly to her heart. The little fairies on the wide steps of fairyland skipped and crowed with glee. "Did you ever!" cried all the little fairies and snapped their pink little fingers and thumbs, and skipped and crowed again, and slid off helter-skelter on sunbeams to welcome the little fairy with the rosy mouth, coming back triumphant.

That should end the story, and on the stage or in the best stories would end it. But, annoyingly but truthfully, not here. The real end of the story came, like the beginning, at Tidborough railway station.

Mr. Tug Sanders had spent an unprofitable, but very jumpy, afternoon, partly in shelter at the police station, and partly hovering timidly out of view of the crowd that stood about Mr. Bassett's residence waiting for the news. The famous strike-breaker made three attempts to penetrate the crowd and reach the house, but each time his courage failed him and he retreated. He dared not. He took himself away — well away — and wandered the country lanes till the seven o'clock up-train should be due. The time came and there came with it to Mr. Sanders a very great alarm. Sneaking furtively through the streets he was frozen to discover the market square, through which he must pass, filled with a yelling, rushing and madly excited crowd of strikers. His hat positively lifted from his head upon his starting

scalp. He pulled it over his eyes and tremulously threaded his way into the mob.

He was well known. His photograph had been in every paper. He had not made fifty yards to the station when he was discovered and his name roared into the welkin. He was seized. He closed his eyes and set his teeth for the hideous end of being torn to death. Lo, he was raised shoulder high. He was held aloft and was being borne aloft to the station. Thunderous roars hymned him on. "Good old Tug Sanders! Good old Tuggy! Three cheers for good old Tuggy — and another — and another — and another!" Hundreds pressed forward to touch his hand. Mothers held up their children to him. Women fought with his carriers to throw their arms about him and kiss him. Girls threw flowers.

Dumfounded; amazed; speechless; in a dream; dead and in another world; the superb and magnificent strike-breaker found himself in a compartment of the up-express and leaning from the window and regarding with a sickly and fatuous grin the tossing mob that tumultuously surged before him, adoring him. His shattered ears had informed him that the strike was ended, the men victorious, but what on earth — ? What the dickens — ?

His sickly and fatuous grin was all he could achieve.

"Ah, ain't 'e modest!" cried a stout lady perched on the platform bookstall for better view of the adored countenance. "Ah, if 'e ain't modest as 'e is noble, the darling."

She then overbalanced and fell off.

Simultaneously the train started. What a shout! What a very delirium of ecstatic cheering! The local brass band, tearing up at the double, and as the *Tidborough County Times* said on the morrow, "at the psychological moment," fixed their instruments with lightning speed. With heartfelt throats the crowd took up the well-known tune. Slowly the stupendous strike-breaker, leaning from the window, smiling his modest, sickly smile, waving his modest lackadaisical hand (he felt it was the least he could do), slowly he was drawn away to the impassioned song, hymned from five hundred throats:

"For he's a jolly good fellow!"

It was tremendous. Strong men wept, and well they might. In the words of the *Tidborough County Times*, "It was a sublime and deeply moving moment."

The stupendous strike-breaker drew in his head and wiped his streaming brow. "Co-oo-ooh!" gasped the stupendous strike-breaker.

"Sir," said an aged gentleman of evangelical appearance seated in the carriage, "Sir, this is the most glorious day in the history of Tidborough. Sir, you are noble! You are noble, sir, and you are enshrined forever in the hearts of this great city. You are noble, sir."

"Oh, well," said the noble strike-breaker. "Oh, well," and sat down, dazed, and tried to look noble what time he thought, "What the dickens —?"

"But that's not fair," cried the new little fairy with

the rosy mouth, peeping. "That's not fair! Why, it wasn't anything to do with him at all!"

"Tish and tush!" said the elderly fairy with the grim, stern look. "Tish and tush, that's nothing! That's nothing to what they do down there sometimes. What *does* it matter, you stupid little scrap, you? Just look at Henry Bassett with little Lucy. Stand on this sunbeam."

IN EVENING BELLS

IN EVENING BELLS

He said his name was Angell.

It was dusk; it was Sunday. Beyond the wood in which I walked, and a harvest field beyond that, was a church; and across the distance, just reaching me and no more, as to high-water mark just steals the tide on a very calm day, there came the bells for evening service; and I thought of Hodgson's line:

“What sound is that in evening bells a harvest field away?”

What sound? My mood was troubled. There is a certain depression of spirits that some have and it was upon me. It is not of one's affairs. It is of vexations that are private, that are secret; a sense that not yourself is to blame though it is you to bear; a sense of unfairness in others though you are fair; a sense that your world, but not through you, is out of joint, selfish, unkind.

It was upon me, this heavy infelicity, and there was in my ears that distant murmur of those bells and in my mind a musing on the line that I have given; and it was thus that I stepped into a clearing of the wood and saw him and approached him where he sat.

He said his name was Angell.

Have I said it was dusk? Among those trees, as in

my mind's oppression, it deeper was than dusk. Here in this glade where I discovered him it was light with a pale, a pearl, grey light. Yet it was strangely dim. It was as if — I only can describe it as I felt it — as if there visibly were here light that invisibly was obscured; as if my eyes were closed and I was conscious through their lids of brightness, as if between me and the light a glass filmed over stood. "As in a glass darkly" the thought came to me; and with the thought it happened that he looked up at me, giving me (it was natural) the conclusion of my thought, "But now face to face"; and curiously the veil that had been was lifted; and strangely the place was light.

I would have said (but I would have thought it, then, absurd to say) that it was his face, thus suddenly turned to me, that lightened the pearl-grey dimness of the place; but I will term it in this way (as indeed it was) that the aspect of his face was of an extraordinary attraction to me; and I had been troubled; and there stirred within my trouble as it were an instinct, telling me companionship was here, a sympathy, an understanding. Wherefore I thought to myself that it was the lifting, not of the material dimness, but of my inward oppression, that caused his face to seem to light the place, and thus I reconciled the tinge of doubt, the certain awe, that the strange strengthening of the light caused in me.

Nevertheless, disturbed, I stood and looked at him.

He smiled; and the attraction he had for me quickened and bade me on; and I went forward; and he spoke.

He said his name was Angell.

He was some yards from me, seated upon the trunk of a felled tree. Greeting me and telling me his name, his voice to reach me where I had emerged from the thicket should have been raised. It did not seem to me to be raised; it came to me on a gentle, a curious inflexion that vaguely was familiar to me; but my greater interest at the moment was the odd courtesy of his naming himself to me, and for the immediate remark I had had on my lips I substituted the return of his compliment; then, coming forward to join him where he sat, I made my observation.

"The light here," I said; "isn't there something strange, unusual, about it?"

He put out a hand towards me and smiled. He was a young man. His features, his uncovered brow, the poise of his head upon his neck, were singularly beautiful. He was uncommonly tall; he had about him some kind of cloak of grey; but it did not, nor did his seated posture, disguise his length of limb. "Nothing strange in the light," he said, and drew down his extended hand and placed it, in invitation to be seated, on the tree beside him. "It is the faculty of seeing it that is not usual," he said, and I thought he sighed.

"If you are right," I agreed, "it is certain that for my own part I have never till now used the faculty."

He replied, and again in his tone I caught that gentle, that curiously familiar inflexion, "'As a lamp despised in the mind of him that is at ease.'"

I relish a good quotation and this one vaguely I could place.

"From the Bible?" I questioned.

He said, "Down here you call it Job."

"Down here? You are not of these parts, then?"

He shook his head.

"A foreigner?"

"I come from a very far-off place," he said.

Where had I heard his voice? What in its cadence was familiar to me? There was a silence fell between us, only the sweet, remote and gentle murmur of those bells. Murmur? They had an echo's sound, a dying fall. Echo of what? I had a feeling of strange influences about me. I heard myself say, "Those bells —"

He said, "Tell me."

I told him that I was walking in those parts, resting two nights in the village there, and on the previous day had met the vicar and had learnt of him an odd practice he had with the bells of his little church, namely to ring them, not only for his services — "As now," I said, and indicated with my hand their distant murmur — but at his services' conclusion; "As presently," I said. "His welcome and his God-speed bells, the old man called them."

There sounded as I stopped one clearer note from out the murmur of the bells.

"Well named," said Angell, and there came to me, causing me an odd sensation, as from a stealthy movement in a darkened room, the clue to what had been familiar in his voice. It had the cadence of those distant bells. I had caught that single clearer note;

his soft "Well named" seemed, as it were, to have depended from it.

Strange! But, no, it could be only fancy. I shook away the thought. "A very good old man, that vicar," I continued; "one of the happy ones"; and I went on to talk to Angell of the stories that I make from faces and of the very lovely face I thought that old man had. "That look," I said, "of exquisite benignity that is given, have you noticed it? to some faces by the religious life. They have some kind of peace I think," I said; and thought upon my own vexations caused me by others, of my world out of joint, thoughtless, self-centered, and I sighed.

"Rather," said Angell, "the beauty of those faces is that they have preserved their heritage."

Their heritage? Again a word he spoke — that "heritage" — seemed in a dying fall to echo from the murmur of those bells. Their heritage? Their heritage?

This was my state. What happened happened thus. Their heritage? My mind in one part sought his meaning, in the other sought within the pulsing of those bells, a murmur like a quiet tide about that place, again to catch that dying fall, and I was aware suddenly that there had been said to me, "Listen, then, to the story of a heritage," and that a story was being told me.

"There was a man once," Angell said, "whose name was Spiritt and who had two friends whose names were Meen the one and the other Noble. The friendship had begun in early boyhood; it strengthened with the years,

and Spiritt, who was the owner of a fine house, had these two to live there with him. This was a great and a fine house that Spiritt had. It came to him from his father at his birth; it was his heritage."

I caught the word. "His heritage? His father, then, was — ?"

"His father lived, but was not resident in that place. He dwelt in another country. He gave his son this house to be his heritage and at the child's christening it entered into the house that thus it had received of its father. There were two guardians set over the child Spiritt; but as he grew up his father, who greatly loved him, daily communicated with him and he communicated with his father. . . .

"Attend," continued Angell, for he had paused, "attend particularly to what I have told you that this was a great and a fine house that the child Spiritt had. It was a temple."

I interrupted him. "A temple! To live in! Where is this story? Not in England?"

"It is in England," Angell said.

"But a temple! As a home!" Perhaps I laughed.

"Oh, man," said Angell very gravely, and I noticed, afterwards, how very frequently he used that term "Oh, man," and how curiously stressed it, as though he not addressed me in the familiarity of the expression, but by my species (as with a capital letter I therefore shall denote). "Oh, Man," said he very earnestly, "there will, in this story, be many things very strange to you. I pray you bear with me."

He put a hand, when he said that, on my knee.

I do not explain the emotions that at his touch and at his gentle plea "I pray you bear with me" surcharged me. I only can say there somehow came upon me something of the uneasy, something of the unnatural, something of the mysterious tension in which one stands when, suddenly breaking a silence profound and purposeful, there is cried sharply, "What was that?"

There had been with that plea of Angell's such a silence; there had been within me, completely possessing me, causing my flesh a little to tingle, my breathing a little to catch, such an apprehension; and I listened terribly; and I heard the faint pulsing of those bells, a murmur like a tide about that place; and I was conscious of myself as it were battling not to distinguish a resonance within that murmur and yet battling desperately to distinguish it; and I heard it said—infininitely small, as though scarcely, beneath some huge restraint, it could be uttered—I heard it said: "'As a lamp despised by him that is at ease.' Oh, Man, if but you will hold that lamp towards my story, then will you bear with me and understand. Oh, Man, we try to make you understand. We're always interceding for you. We get out sometimes and then we try, oh, try, to tell you what we mean. We're not allowed to. We know, of course, that you've been told and ought to understand; but you don't; you have forgotten; and our hearts bleed for you, and we try, try. . . . We know it is ordained that you must go your own way and that we must not explain. We know that we must only use your own language and that it hides our meaning; but

if you only will hold the lamp towards our voices, if you only will bear with us —— ”

The dreadful tension passed. I heard, as bells, the murmur of those bells, and I heard Angell saying :

“ This temple that he lived in only at first, when Spiritt was a child, an infant, attracted the attention that you were thinking would make a temple in this country impossible of residence. Afterwards, when Spiritt grew older, he altered the design, and the strangeness, the glory, that was of that place departed from that place and it was notable no more. But, oh, at first ! Oh, Man, when at his christening it first was occupied by this child Spiritt, oh, incontestably a temple then, beautiful beyond a dream. People *did* stare at it in those days. Its exquisite beauty filled with sheer wonder those of them that were of the thinking kind. The most unthinking it filled with delight. People almost went into adoration before it. Friends would crowd about it. Passers-by would stand and stare at it. On old people, even on middle-aged people, it had a strange effect.”

“ What effect, Angell ? ”

“ A sad and yet a sweet effect. A kind of yearning, a sort of hopeless longing, a sense, terribly poignant, of something that might have been theirs — lost.”

“ You mean they contrasted it with their own homes ? ”

He bowed his head in deep assent.

“ Then you have thought,” he said, “ a temple not suitable, as to its rooms, to dwell in. This temple that Spiritt had was in every way, both inside and out, the

most perfect residence a man could imagine. It had everything for every use and luxury; it had nothing that was not both beautiful and good. It was, as well, of wonderful interior. Spiritt, who alone had the full secrets of it, could hide and be lost in this temple of his. It had secret chambers, labyrinthine corridors, dungeons, turret-rooms, places remote and inaccessible except to Spiritt, and he could, and often did, get away into them and be alone where none could find him. Oh, fearfully and wonderfully made that house of his!"

"But you are speaking of him now," I said — "of his getting away to be alone in his house, his temple — when he was older, out of childhood?"

Angell told me, "Out of childhood, yes, and his friends Meen and Noble equal with him in his years. Have I told you how, when they were children, he first met them? He was some six or seven then, nine or ten perhaps, and it was resident in his own house he found them, not, as you might think, met in the homes of friends."

"Resident in his house? Resident in his own house before he knew they were there?"

"It was so," Angell said. "Even before he really discovered them and had them for his intimate companions, even before that he had caught glimpses of them, flitting away down distant corridors, hidden in and darting away from unexpected rooms —"

"But some one must have known —"

"His father knew. It was his father caused ~~them~~ to be there."

"*Caused* them? Angell, his father, in this other

country where he lived — how do you mean *caused* them? ”

He said, “ ‘ As a lamp despised — ’ ” He said, “ I pray you bear with me.”

I said, “ Go on.”

He thus went on: “ They soon became his friends, these two. Friends — more than friends — his intimates, his — do you use this word? — his two *familiars*. They were very different. Noble, when first Spiritt encountered him and throughout Spiritt’s boyhood, was virile, strong, robust and of much force of character. He very greatly attracted the boy Spiritt, and, attracting him, gained much ascendancy over him. Where Noble led, Spiritt followed; and Noble always led. He was the originator of every boyish enterprise, leader in every boyish game. You are to imagine the house resounding with the happy laughter of those two. From morning to evening they were at sport together. They shared the same bedroom; they were never apart; they were inseparable.

“ Very different,” continued Angell, “ was Meen. A weak and puling child. He was undeveloped, undersized, very frequently laid up, doing nothing, scarcely ever out of doors. His condition is very difficult to tell you in your words. You have your expression ‘ more dead than alive.’ Meen, in Spiritt’s boyhood, was like that; throughout those earlier years — sick unto death; yes, scarcely with a spark of life; often from day to day scarcely expected to live.”

“ Angell, why? ”

“ Neglect,” said Angell. “ Meen was neglected.”

I said, "But, Angell, neglect like that — cruelty —"

Again he laid his hand upon my knee. "Oh, Man," he said, "it was right that the child Meen thus should be neglected. It was right. I pray you, if you do not understand, bear with me —"

"Go on," I said; and I was conscious by the pressure of his hand upon my knee he thanked me.

"Meen was neglected by Spiritt," he continued, "and it was right he should be. Spiritt was for ever with his good familiar Noble, and he was completely under Noble's influence and happy thus to be. You are to imagine Meen, seeing himself not wanted, keeping himself in the background; lurking in that house miserable, dejected, useless; and you are to imagine Spiritt's guardians much approving and encouraging Spiritt's friendship with Noble, much delighting in the ascendancy Noble had over him. You are to imagine that, and it was in this wise that the early years went on. Came now the years of school; Spiritt at a Public School; Noble there with him; Meen — not there."

"Still sickly, Angell?"

He shook his head. "Not that. Oh, Man, consent to this — there was no place for Meen in that school to which Spiritt went; there is no place in any Public School for such as Meen was. Schools kill such boys."

"Kill! Angell —"

He said, entreating me, "Oh, Man, consent! I pray you bear —"

I said, "Go on."

He told me: "And after school to College Spiritt; and Noble with him still; and still not Meen. But

Meen — attend to this — was now of something livelier health and sometimes Spiritt friendly with him. He was not good for Spiritt. At school twice, at the University more times than twice, Meen visited Spiritt and it was coincident with his visits that each time there was some base action that Spiritt did. At the school on a day of Meen's visit Spiritt told on a boy and put that boy in punishment, thereby himself escaping; at the University a visit was made by Meen on a day that Spiritt, entered for a scholarship, knew of the sudden putting forward of the hour at which one paper of the examination was to be held and knew his closest rival (who was a friend of his) did not know. Mark this — that Spiritt's instinct was to tell this rival. Meen came to him and argued with him 'Why?' 'That rival had as good a chance to know as you,' urged Meen. 'It is no duty of yours to tell him. If he should miss this paper — Why should you rob yourself of the advantage you, merely by not telling him, will secure? Why should you?' And Spiritt, thus persuaded, did not."

A pause was made by Angell. "That marked," he then said, "a point. It marked the first real symptom of what became in Spiritt a growing taste for Meen's society. I will traverse a score of years for you, then will come back upon them; there are things that will be hard to make quite clear. The young man Spiritt, embarking on his place in life, passed from the University into an administrative branch of the Civil Service. Promotion, up to the point at which are brought in view the prizes of those higher grades in

which was Spiritt, goes by seniority; then — as go the prizes in every walk of life — by selection. Spiritt, when he had been nearly twenty years in his department — and in this period had married — was well in view for a post much coveted. By seniority this much desirable post was his; selection was made and it was not his. He was passed over. A colleague junior to himself, of whom Spiritt had long been envious and (as you shall hear) in a previous contest had out-rivalled, was chosen in his place.

“Spiritt,” said Angell, “when he heard the news was not in the common sense of the word disappointed; he was disappointed in the savage sense of the word, the sense in which is disappointed a caged beast to which meat is shown then snatched away. He was furious. He threw up his position, took his meagre pension and retired to live on his estate. He was still a young man, a man of forty-two, but he was a disappointed and an embittered man.

“Now I go back. These were the years, in his term in the Civil Service, of the change in Spiritt’s attitude toward his two companions. Now was a growing friendliness with Meen and signs of Meen’s ascendancy. Now was the gradual falling out of sympathy with Noble and Noble’s loss of hold. Now was the time he made his marriage, marrying a girl of beauty and of charm. Now was the time of jealousy towards his office mates; and now is to be said it was significant that not the least part of his satisfaction in his bride was that he won her from that colleague of whom I have spoken, who also passionately had courted her.”

“Angell, significant of what?” said I.

“Significant,” said Angell, “of his increasing friendliness with Meen. As farther down the road of life trod Spiritt, accumulating years in his office and maturing in his married state, more and more associated he with Meen and more and more fell off from Noble. Noble and Meen were never, and never had been, on speaking terms. As Spiritt developed affinities with Meen, so naturally fell into desuetude affinities with Noble. Meen, who as a child, had been less than weakling, as a man took on health and character at a pace and in a degree very remarkable.

“Oh, Man,” said Angell, his voice impressive, “oh, Man, listen when I tell you that at his changed choice of friends none was more surprised and none more grieved than Mary, Spiritt’s wife. That woman, like all else who knew Noble, was completely under Noble’s charm. She never loved her husband so much as when, in Noble’s company, he comported himself under Noble’s ascendancy. You might say that she fell in love with him and married him because of his companionship with Noble. You might say further this, — that she never would have married Spiritt if she had known that he knew Meen.”

“Angell,” I said, “she must have known. Spiritt, when she would first have met him, and while he was courting her, and while they were betrothed, had been living in his very house with him. She must have known.”

“Oh, Man,” said Angell, “remember the secret hiding-places of that house where Spiritt lived, its laby-

rinthine corridors, its dungeons, towers, privy fastnesses — ”

I said, “ But, still — ”

“ Nothing,” said Angell, “ that Spiritt desired to hide in that house could ever be seen by another unless he chose to reveal it. He never till after their marriage revealed to Mary that he had Meen as dweller there. Truly there were, before he did disclose it, occasions when she had strange suspicions of an inmate of that place unknown to her. As the early months of their marriage strengthened into permanent relations she sometimes, when with Spiritt or when thinking of him, caught glimpses of a sinister presence furtively about the house, and it dismayed her; but she would assure herself that it was nothing, only her imagination; and she was a brave and loyal soul, though gentle.

“ But Meen was there. He was there; and the time developed when Spiritt’s increasing fondness for his company caused to be very frequent and to accumulate the evidences of a stranger in the house that gave Mary transient alarm; and then one day she saw Meen full and face to face; and it was a terrible discovery for her.”

“ Angell,” I said, “ was Meen then so clearly bad that at a single first sight of him —— ? ”

“ He was vile,” said Angell. “ That man was vile; and dreadful to Mary was her discovery of him and dreadful this — that no sooner had she fully come upon him than she found her husband’s company never without him. Spiritt was now always with Meen and Meen’s ascendancy became as great as had been

Noble's. Noble's had been for good, Meen's was for bad; that was the difference. It showed in this — in Spiritt's continuous and increasing jealousy of his colleagues in his office; in his new but rapidly developing hostility towards his wife. In his office, and when thinking of his office, Spiritt was resentful, petty, quick at affront, envious and bitter; in his home, returning dispirited and sore, he was by turns morose, fault-finding, bullying, impossible to please. It was in these ways that Meen's influence showed."

"Angell," I said, "you say Meen's influence was responsible. It is not plain ——"

"Things *rankled* with Spiritt," Angell said. "Little things at the office and little things at home rankled and festered in him, and it was Meen caused them thus to rankle and to fester. Spiritt began to think that the lot of his office colleagues was easier than his lot, and in part he hated them for it and in part he pitied himself for it. He began to think that his wife did not sympathise with him and did not understand him and was not grateful to him, and in part he was resentful against her for it and in part he pitied himself for it.

"He talked of these things to Meen," said Angell, "and Meen inflamed them within him. It began to come to the pass at which there was no action or no thought that he considered but he looked at it first through the eyes of Meen and carried it out or indulged it as Meen prompted him. He had been the protégé and disciple of Noble, and that was uplifting and stimulating. But he became the slave of Meen, and that was debasing and debilitating.

"The pitiable thing," continued Angell, his voice at impressive gravity, "the pitiable thing was that at this, the very time when Spiritt should have called Noble to his counsel and to his aid, he was, under the influence of Meen, detesting the very thought of Noble and of all that belonged to Noble. He grew to hate the man — his old familiar friend!

"He set himself at last," said Angell, "to have him die."

I said, "To have him die? To murder him?"

"Noble was sick," said Angell. "There was a great change upon him in these later years. As Meen, out of a puling childhood and a sickly youth, had sprung into a manhood singularly vigorous and robust, so Noble, a lion in his younger age, in middle years, bereft of Spiritt's old solicitude, became dispirited, declined, fell weak. He was an easy prey to Spiritt's base intentions, and Spiritt, instigated by Meen, made up his mind to have him die and thus remove his presence. It was easy by reason of Noble's state of health; it was easy by reason of the facilities for concealment that were offered Spiritt by his house. He had but to shut away Noble in some privy chamber and there abandon him, and this, urged on by Meen, he did. Within that secret cell Noble, Spiritt knew, was sinking fast and soon must die. He kept away. He was forever with Meen, whispering with him. When he would think, in swift remorse, to go to Noble in his cell, he was withheld by Meen and did not go. The man was dying in there. There was about that house an ugly air."

I said, "It was horrible. What of Mary?"

“For Mary terrible. Oh, Man, it terrible is indeed for a dweller in a house with one beneath the will of a man such as Meen. Under that influence Spiritt’s conduct towards his wife became increasing base. He did nothing violent to her. Sometimes she wished he would. Sometimes she felt that anything, however brutal, would be welcome so long as it was open and direct. What crushed her was that nothing her husband did was open and direct. All his behaviour was underhand, crafty, sly. He was always on the look-out to catch her in a thousand little trifles that were of themselves nothing but that enabled him to put her in the wrong and himself in the right. He began to inflict upon her periods, sometimes of days together, in which he would never open his mouth to her. More often than not a meal would be taken without a word, much as she tried. He would leave the house in the morning without good-bye, he would return in the evening and still be dumb. She suffered further this distress—the sudden and not accounted-for disappearance of Noble from their household. It first surprised her, she could not understand it. It then bewildered her, then dismayed her, then, as she gave him up for gone, only most utterly grieved her.”

I said, “Did she not ask? Angell, did she not ask her husband where this Noble was?”

“She asked him once.”

“Tell me,” I said.

“They were at dinner one night,” Angell said. “Spiritt during several days had not spoken a word to her. At this meal, her endurance gone, she expostu-

lated. 'What have I done, what have I ever done,' she cried, 'to make you treat me thus?'

"Spiritt began on her then a blistering attack that lasted through the meal, half whine, half venom — that she did not understand him, that she did not sympathise with him, that his life was one long round of work unrecognised and unrewarded and that his wife, who should have been the first to comfort him, gave him no comfort.

"In reply she for the first time in their married life broke out and gave him her side of their case — told him of his pettiness, of his secrecy, of his enlargement of trifles, of his danger of ruining his career by his envy and jealousy of others.

"He answered her with poisoned words and he finished: 'God alone knows why I ever married you!'

"She murmured, 'Yes, God only!'; and she then said, 'But I know why I married you. I married you because you appealed to me above all else as being so noble, so high-minded. All that' — she made a desolate gesture with her hand — 'is gone!'

Angell looked towards me and was silent.

I questioned, "Yes?"

"That was the instance," Angell said.

"The instance? Angell, that was no instance of her asking him what had happened to Noble."

"Oh, Man," he said, "it was. Can you not understand?"

I shook my head. I had no words. My voice when I had questioned him had been a whisper. I had increasingly a feeling — how shall it be described? —

of listening as might listen in a stillness one whose life hung upon the hearing of some sound, of peering as might peer towards a footfall in the night one standing sentinel, alarmed.

“Go on,” I said.

He thus continued, “Spiritt was closing in his hand on Noble. Sometimes he now would go to the cell and look at him; and sometimes, looking upon that wasted form and reflecting upon the days when this had been his vigorous and splendid friend, would in a swift remorse think to recover him and bring him out. He never could. Meen ever was at his elbow prompting him against such thoughts, encouraging him by temptations to his own genial company to abandon the other; and the time came when for a period longer than ever before Spiritt went not near to the cell where the dying man lay.

“It was in this period he was savaged with bitterness by the news that his colleague had been passed over his head into the appointment he had coveted; it was now he threw up his position, retired, as I have told you, and came to live at home on his small pension. His wife, as he approached this decision, implored him not to take a step so fatal to both their interests. Her entreaties served but to stiffen him in his resolve. When one night he told her he had written and sent in his resignation: ‘This means,’ she said, ‘I shall have to give up the last few interests that are dear to me — the few pounds I have been able to scrape together for my mother; the few books it has been my delight to buy; the trifles I have been able to spend on

my flower garden; the little cottage I so dearly loved where I have been able to keep my old nurse in her declining years. Oh, will you have me give up these?’

“‘I hate those interests of yours,’ Spiritt told her. ‘It is my money that has gone on them, not yours. There is to me one satisfaction in this retirement of mine and it is that those things you like to do — are done.’

“Tears rushed into her eyes and she threw herself on a couch and wept bitterly. ‘Oh,’ she cried, ‘you are *mean*, you are *mean*!’

“At that cry of hers,” said Angell, “Spiritt was startled — first startled, then furious, then amused.”

“But, Angell —” I said.

“He went out from her,” pursued Angell, “and went along the labyrinthine corridors towards the cell where Noble lay.”

I had to break in. “But, Angell,” I cried, “at what that she had said to him was Spiritt startled? Why startled? At what amused? Why amused?”

“At being taken,” said Angell, “for his friend Meen.”

“But, Angell —”

My interruption was unheeded. “He went to the cell,” said Angell, “and looked in. Noble was dead.”

* * * * *

I do not explain (as before I have said I could not explain) the emotions that at this climax of this story much possessed me. I knew again as then that dreadful tension, again that sense of pressing mystery, again that numbing awe; and knew myself listening

most terribly again; and heard again those bells amurmur like a tide about that place; and in my duress heard again it said, "We try, oh, try, to make you understand . . . we're not allowed to . . . we try . . ."

But there was now this change in this my state — that I seemed to myself, in a great agony of desolation, to be pleading; but for whom I pleaded I did not know; and I cried, but could not hear my voice, but knew that my voice spoke, "Noble was dead! But there is this I cannot see: why, when Spiritt's wife called Spiritt mean, should he have thought she was mistaking him for Meen, his friend?"

I seemed to be pleading. "I do not understand," I cried, "how Spiritt, how any man, possibly could have thought that."

It was answered me: "Not always is it realised by a man that he is mean."

I seemed to be pleading: "He would know," I cried, "if he were mercenary."

It was answered me: "Not always is it realised there is meanness, not of money, but of nature."

I seemed to be pleading; but at those words to be in sore despite; to have had my pleas cut down from under me; to be able to plead no more.

* * * * *

"You are troubled?" I heard it said, and this was Angell's voice.

I said, "I am beset. I am perplexed. I am ——"

"There is a comfort in my story," Angell most gravely said.

I cried, "There is no comfort, not in your story, not within my world, no comfort, none."

"There is a comfort," Angell said. "Know that there was in later years a change came over that man Spiritt. When he retired, a disappointed man, and when, a disappointed man, he settled down in closest company with Meen to make life a misery and a torment for all about him, he was one day, not as is commonly the case by any affliction, but by a sudden interlude of clear reasoning, brought to take stock of his position, and to examine himself impersonally. In a depth of those depths of misery into which often he was plunged, he asked himself: 'Why am I miserable, why always unhappy? Why is my life a burden to me?' And he reasoned it that his life was a failure and his existence a burden not, as he had believed, by the fault of those, particularly his wife, whom he had accused of it, but by the fault of his association with this Meen, by the fault of his allowing this Meen to share his house and influence his way.

"Do not believe," said Angell, his voice most earnest, "do not believe it is impossible that a man, thus deep in slavery of another, cannot see that other in his true light and set himself to free himself. There is the parallel, most common, in a man, much abandoned to drink, realising the thief he puts within his mouth to steal away his brains, and setting himself to bind in chains that monster. In such discovery did Spiritt realise his house by Meen was being destroyed: he saw that man had become a part of himself and had become the stronger part, possessing him as devils. He sat

away from Meen on the day of this discovery and he realised, with a sudden lift and with a sudden glory, that Meen was not, in fact, a part of himself; that Meen occupied his house, not of prescriptive right, but as a lodger only, a guest, a visitor on sufferance, a parasite that could be shed.

"Oh," cried Angell, "what a joy to Spiritt was in that revelation! 'I have suffered him too long!' cried Spiritt. 'I will throw out this man! I will rid my house of this destroyer of my house, this parasite, this fiend, and throw his shoes out after him!'"

"It was not easy. Meen fought, and Meen could fight. Meen had a hold within that house of Spiritt's, and desperately hard it was to shake him. But he was had at a disadvantage. Spiritt, who before submissively and unquestionably had accepted him, knew him now for what he was, a lodger only; and strong in this his new discovery, Spiritt, before an action or a thought, would pause, and it was that pause that shook Meen. And Spiritt, pausing, would say, 'This is Meen's hand here'; and it was as if those words were a dagger through the hand and through the soul of Meen."

He stopped. I knew his stopping questioned me.

I said, "Yes, comfort. For that man Spiritt there was hope of comfort there. But, Angell, there was this upon his soul — there was that Noble — dead."

"He had hope," said Angell, "in the matter of Noble."

"What hope?"

"Hope of his father."

"How of his father, Angell?"

"He confessed to his father."

"Confessed? What hope is mere confession?"

"Oh, Man," said Angell, "know you not how when you see in trouble one you love you cannot help because you are not told? 'If only he would tell me everything,' you say. We call it Trust. 'If only,' Spiritt's father cried, 'if only he would trust me!' The day was when Spiritt did; and on that day his father came to him in his house and dwelt in his house with him."

"But helped him? How helped him, Angell? Noble was dead. What could his father do?"

"There were," said Angell, "strange powers and mysteries that his father had."

* * * *

Newly upon the air upon those words those bells; no murmur now, but now in music faint yet exquisitely clear; now in no dying fall, but now upborne to me in upward strain.

I do not explain. . . .

"The God-speed bells," I thought, and saw that time had passed, that night was down, that dark and starred above us stood the vault.

"Tell me," I said, "these powers and these mysteries."

"It is the end that I will tell you," Angell said. "Spiritt at last one day forever rid his house of Meen; and on that day he told his wife (who much had seen and much delighted in Meen's losing influence) that those fond pleasures of hers of which he had deprived her he intended now to restore to her. It would involve

for himself, he said, small sacrifices. He was glad it should. There had been much unhappiness between them, he told her. He thought there not again would be; and he said then to her, those words that are the hardest words a man can speak. She had been, while he told her, crying, as once before she cried; but these were very gentle, happy tears. He put his arms about her and said the words that are so hard to say:

“ ‘It has been all my fault,’ he said. ‘Forgive me, I am sorry.’ ”

“Listen,” said Angell, “to the words of her reply. The words of her reply informed him his familiar friend that he had shut away to death miraculously was restored to life; had never died; had suffered, like Lazarus, a trance; inhabited with him now his house again. The words his wife at his atonement cried to him were, ‘Oh, you are *noble*, you are *noble*!’ ”

“But Angell,” I cried, “that same confusion, as when she told him he was mean, of a quality and a person — how could he think — ? Angell — ”

He was not there!

Could I believe my eyes? I could not believe them. He had been beside me, touching me. Can a man vanish? A man cannot vanish. I could not believe my eyes. I put out my hand and passed my hand along the place where he had sat. He was not there. . . .

Had those bells stopped? I listened. No bells — but yes, some sound. I listened. High in the night above me beat like a pulse a sound, faint as I caught it, faint, fainter, fainter, exquisitely tiny, gone. . . .

It was the sound of the beat of a wing.

I gazed about. High in the nadir overhead a star stood, singularly bright. Never so bright a star. . . . But was it bright? It was dimming, it was receding, it was faint, fainter, fainter, exquisitely tiny, gone . . .

* * * * *

As I trod home I met outside his church the vicar, that wise and kind old man of the serenity of whose mild face the thought had but the day before been mine that it reflected light as bears the quiet sea upon its countenance the moon; and would have passed him; and on a sudden impulse stopped and put a question:

“Vicar, you preached to-night?”

He told me “Yes.”

“You preached; what was your text?”

“A beautiful text,” he said. “From the Corinthians. ‘What, know ye not that your body is the temple of God?’”

And I knew then:—Spiritt, but I had spelt it wrongly, the spirit of a man, as mine; his temple—that heritage of his, lovely in innocence, disfigured as he grows—his body that his soul inhabits, with labyrinthine corridors, dungeons, fastnesses remote and unapproachable, wherein his secret self may hide; Noble and Meen, those twin familiars, nobility and meanness which dwell therein with him, which grow or die according as they are by him fostered or put away.

And I knew then, touching my private hurts, my sense of hardship, my sense of others, not myself, to blame . . . Meen in my temple in ascendancy.

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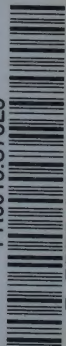
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